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Does Athletic Participation Develop Followership Skills? A Case Study on the
Development of Followership Through Athletics

Submitted to Southeastern University

Jannetides College of Business, Communication, and Leadership

In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Organizational Leadership

Sara M. Smith

August 21, 2023

Jannetides College of Business, Communication, and Leadership
Southeastern University

This is to certify that the dissertation prepared by:

Sara M. Smith

titled

**DOES ATHLETIC PARTICIPATION DEVELOP FOLLOWERSHIP
SKILLS? A CASE STUDY ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF
FOLLOWERSHIP THROUGH ATHLETICS**

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Abstract

The role of athletes is to follow the lead of their coaches, captains, and other teammates while working towards the shared goal of team achievement. However, collegiate athletic participation is often attributed to the development of leadership skills. The purpose of this study was to advance the understanding of followership development within athletics. Further, I sought to understand better the perception of student-athletes and coaches on how athletic involvement contributed to the development of followership skills and leadership skills. The study was guided by research questions in which I asked if participants perceived athletic participation contributed to the development of followership skills, what the perceived relationship between leadership and followership skills was, and how coaches and student-athletes perceive the role of athletics on the development of followership skills differently. With the use of qualitative methods, I conducted interviews with collegiate student-athletes and coaches while also reviewing institutional documents. Data analysis revealed six emergent themes relating to followership development through athletic participation: (1) formation of followership, (2) followership skills formed through sport, (3) followership skills enhance life skills, (4) effective followers enable team success, (5) leadership and followership skills are transferable, (6) leaders should promote followership. This study expands and further develops the understanding of followership development. Further, I discussed opportunities for continued followership discussion within the realm of athletics as well as ways to enhance student-athlete experience with intentional followership development.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my dearest friend Jenel Irene Johnson. Her never-ending friendship from the age of ten until her arrival at heaven's gate has been integral in my confidence to pursue such hard tasks. From her support as my travel buddy and Zeke's caretaker during my very first intensive at Southeastern University to her constant encouragement with the words "You're the smartest person I know, you've got this" through nearly every phase of this doctoral journey, I am forever grateful. Although she is not here to celebrate with me the completion of this journey, I know that she is always watching over me, Zeke, and Emery.

This dissertation is also dedicated to my son, Ezekiel "Zeke" Smith. It is his mere presence that motivates me to do better each and every day. I am so blessed that the Lord chose me to be his mother.

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Thank you to my dissertation committee. Dr. Henson, your course on followership has forever changed my life. Not only did the content resonate so deeply with my lived experiences within athletics, but your guidance towards being an expert scholar helped direct my steps throughout my doctoral journey. Dr. Peters, thank you for your gentleness and kindness throughout my coursework and as my methodologist. I appreciate your encouragement and guidance throughout the analysis process. Dr. Dean, thank you for your thorough review and encouraging comments as I wrote this document.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

College athletic participation has grown significantly in the past decade, with recent reports indicating that nearly 600,000 college students are involved in athletic programs at the National College Athletic Association (NCAA) level, National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) level, and the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) level (U.S. Sports Scholarships, n.d.). Due to the over 50% of college students participating in college athletics (Meyers, 2020; National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2019; Schwarb, 2018), researchers have argued that student athletes are the perfect sampling for the development of lifelong skills (Neely & Holt, 2014). Although leadership development within athletic teams has been saturated with research (Loughead, 2017), there is a limited focus on how athletic participation aids in the development of followership skills (Imholte et al., 2019; Lyons, 2015; Wallace & Shipherd, 2020). An increased understanding of the construct of followership and the development of followership skills could improve team members' leadership capabilities, team success, and individual contributions beyond the athletic realm (Bastardo & Van Vugt, 2019).

Followership, as defined by Uhl-Bien et al. (2014), refers to “the characteristics, behaviors, and processes of individuals who act in relation to leaders” (p. 96). Other researchers suggested that followership refers to an individual's behaviors while working toward a shared goal (Carsten & Uhl-Bien, 2012). Regardless, it is imperative to recognize that even when traditional leaders exist, the role of followers is interconnected to that of a leader (Ndonye, 2022). Therefore, exploring the role followers play within the setting of team sport is essential to understanding followers' behaviors, characteristics, and actions that contribute to successful outcomes.

Empirical research on followership revealed that followership is associated with weakness and lack of ability (Alcorn, 1992; Chaleff, 2009; Schuder, 2016). Historically, “machismo” (Armstrong, 2021, p. 148) prevailed within the realm of athletics, indicating that non-athletes or lower-performing athletes were less valued. However, increased awareness of healthy leader-follower relationships could

contribute to the elimination of the degradation of followers, dominant leaders, and authoritative atmospheres within athletics. Specifically, as coaches and athletic leaders consider more democratic processes, healthy followership development within athletics could become more prevalent than authoritarian environments. Recognizing how leadership as a shared process effectively aids in team success (Leo et al., 2019), teams must begin to understand and develop followers within teams who can partake in the leadership process from the role of follower. Leo et al. (2019) examined the number of leaders within teams and determined that most teams operate with one to three assigned leaders, although team sizes are often 20 or more athletes. Moreover, Fransen et al. (2014) examined sports teams and discovered that only 1% of participants perceived formal leaders as effective. Therefore, to aid in the development of leadership among nonleading team members, effective development of followership could provide opportunities for all team members to make an impact and influence growth of the team (Armstrong, 2021; Foley, 2015; Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2020; Leo et al., 2019).

Intentional development of followership skills, especially within the realm of athletics, could lead to increased team success, growth of leadership ability, and enhanced student-athlete experiences (Foley, 2015; Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2020; Peters & Haslam, 2018; Schuder, 2016). Leadership development within athletics has been significantly resourced with various programs and training (Casey, 2021; Monda et al., 2016; National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics, n.d.; National College Athletic Association, n.d.a; USA Swimming, n.d.). Transferring the focus of student-athlete development to intentional development of followership could significantly improve the student-athlete experience while increasing leadership abilities (Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2020; Meyers, 2020).

Researchers have suggested reversing the lens of current leadership theories to analyze further the development of followership (Khan et al., 2020; Shamir, 2007). Therefore, to add to the body of literature and knowledge about followership, this researcher explored the perception of followership development among current student-athletes and coaches. Ultimately, understanding how

student-athletes and coaches perceive the role athletics played in followership skill growth could further explain the characteristics and development of followership.

Statement of the Problem

With significant growth in collegiate athletic participation (Meyers, 2020; Schwarb, 2018), coaches and administrators have made the call to reverse the lens of athletic participation from physical performance to character building (Düz & Aslan, 2020; Johnston et al., 2013). Specifically, researchers have suggested that sports involvement strongly contributes to developing life skills (Düz & Aslan, 2020). Johnston et al. (2013) suggested that sports participation contributes to increased behavioral skills, social abilities, and emotional capacity development. Individuals participating in sports often have increased leadership characteristics (Johnston et al., 2013) and are more prepared to immerse into society and perform adequately (Lerner et al., 2005).

Athletic teams often promote top-down leadership by the nature of team structure. Crozier et al. (2017) examined the impact formal and informal team leaders have on the overall group and suggested that both contribute to increased team support, team environment, and team success. Similarly, Fransen et al. (2014) examined the effectiveness of formal and informal leaders within teams and concluded that the most effective leaders were identified as informal leaders or followers. Informal leaders, or followers, provide team support, leadership behaviors, and feedback for teammates just as frequently as defined leaders (Crozier et al., 2017; Fransen et al., 2014). Therefore, examining the contributions of team members without formal leadership roles within teams is imperative to better understanding followership development within athletics.

Athletic participation is often deemed a significant contributor to developing hardworking, committed, and dedicated individuals (Gellock et al., 2019). Prilipko (2019) outlined characteristics that exemplary followers portray, including tolerance, communication, reliability, supporting others, and motivation. Additionally, Crozier et al. (2017) suggested that the positive attitudes informal leaders bring to an athletic team contribute to the overall experiences and increased enjoyment of team involvement. Ultimately, athletic participation leads to the

development of strong and effective personal character traits (Gellock et al., 2019), as well as strong social skills and emotional competency (Neely & Holt, 2014), which are necessary for effective leaders.

Recognizing the overlap of followership characteristics described by Prilipko (2019) and student-athlete attributes indicates a need to examine further the relationship between athletic participation and followership skill development. Investigating how athletic participation contributes to the development of followership skills could lead to a growing body of knowledge on followership, increased individual growth within athletics opportunities, and overall continued team success. Though the construct of followership is a growing area of research, limited examination of predictors of followership exists. Further, many scholars have suggested that too few people understand the role of followers within groups and teams (Carsten et al., 2010; Crossman & Crossman, 2011; Howell & Shamir, 2005; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Interestingly, researchers have investigated how to develop followership and have recognized the value of followers within teams (Larsson & Nielsen, 2021). Therefore, it is imperative for researchers to continue examining followership continues to expand followership literature as followership theory continues to become integrated into leadership research, development, and application.

Purpose of the Research

When analyzing leadership abilities, the process of followership is often overlooked. Researchers have suggested that effectively developing followership could aid in the growth of leadership abilities, as followership is part of the process of effective leadership (Leo et al., 2019; Thompson, 2020). Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the ways, if any, in which student-athletes and coaches perceive followership skills were developed during collegiate athletic participation and involvement.

The researcher employed a qualitative methodology to investigate the development of followership skills within athletic participation effectively. The use of qualitative research allowed for participants' thoughts, perceptions, and beliefs to be analyzed thoroughly (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Throughout the study, the

researcher aimed to better understand student-athlete perceptions relating to followership development. Therefore, conducting multiple interviews helped explore a range of individual perceptions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018) of followership ability while exploring factors that aided in developing followership. Interviews were used to create space for participants to describe and build their meanings of the experiences discussed. An additional data source used was document analysis, examining the framework for developing leadership within athletic teams and the department.

Research Questions

To gain a better understanding of how sports participation aids in the development of followership among student-athletes in this study, the researcher explored the following questions:

- RQ₁: How do athletic participation experiences contribute to the participants' followership skills?
- RQ₂: How do student-athletes and coaches perceive the role of athletic participation in developing followership skills?
- RQ₃: How do student-athletes and coaches perceive the relationship between followership and leadership skills?
- RQ₄: How do the perceptions of coaches and student-athletes differ concerning the role of athletic participation in developing followership skills?

Significance of the Research

Athletic involvement creates the opportunity to develop lifelong characteristics and skills (Blanton et al., 2019; Düz & Aslan, 2020). Furthermore, coaches and athletic administrators have significantly valued the development of lifelong skills (Monda et al., 2016). As the construct of followership continues to grow, it is imperative that researchers continue to explore followership development. The study provides insight into the value of athletic participation on followership development and skills. Further, the study could aid in creating enhanced student-athlete experiences by offering insight into the organic growth of

followership among student-athletes of various sports. Lastly, intentional followership development could assist coaches, athletic administrators, and teams to improve team atmosphere and success.

Conceptual Framework

Student-athlete involvement has often been instrumental for the development of future leaders through preparation and exploration of civic responsibility (Cánovas-Alvarez et al., 2020; Navarro & Malvaso, 2015). Significant time, energy, research, and resources have been spent on student-athlete leadership development programs to ensure a successful transition from sports to societal contributors (Cánovas-Alvarez et al., 2020; Loughead, 2017; Navarro & Malvaso, 2015). Recognizing the transfer of skills from followership to leadership, Imholte et al. (2019) suggested that researchers explore the organic growth of leadership development throughout followership. Therefore, the purpose of the current study was to explore the relationships between the constructs of followership and student-athlete participation.

Researchers have argued that student-athletes are the perfect sample for exploring followership skills and development (Crozier et al., 2017; Johnson, 2018). Others have suggested exploring student-athlete perception relating to followership to inform character development among student-athletes (Duguay et al., 2019; Loughead, 2017). Therefore, the construct of followership guided this study and enhanced the understanding of followership within sports. The primary constructs of followership and student-athlete development provided the framework to address the study's research questions. In this study, the researcher explored how participation in organized team sports contributes to developing followership skills among student-athletes.

The construct of followership has been under-researched, and limited focus has been given to understanding the contributions followers have within the leader-follower dynamic (Bastardoz & Van Vugt, 2019; Carsten & Uhl-Bien, 2012; Carsten et al., 2010, 2018; Chaleff, 2009; du Plessis & Boshoff, 2018; Howell & Shamir, 2005; Khan et al., 2020; Kindarto et al., 2020). To understand followership better, many researchers have begun to explore the many characteristics of effective

followership (Bastardo & Van Vugt, 2019; Larsson & Nielsen, 2021). Additionally, researchers have investigated how to develop followership and have recognized the value effective followers have on teams (Bastardo & Van Vugt, 2019; Larsson & Nielsen, 2021). Furthermore, researchers have suggested that effective followers often influence team members and leaders and aid in achieving goals (Guo, 2018; Johnson, 2018; Larsson & Nielsen, 2021). Therefore, followership theory is becoming more integrated into leadership research, development, and application.

Within athletic teams, followers are often the more influential players of a group or team (Grant & Ashford, 2008; Jiang et al., 2021). Specifically, the behaviors of effective followers result in inclusive teams to work towards a mutual or shared goal (Jiang et al., 2021). Thompson (2020) suggested that effective followership can be practiced, encouraged, and developed within daily activities. Therefore, examining if athletic team participation effectively embeds followership constructs and follower identity throughout the sport could enhance student-athlete development while contributing to life skills growth.

Methodology

In this study, the researcher used a multi-site case study approach and a phenomenological approach to explore the development of followership skills within the context of athletic participation. Case study research aids in exploring real-life situations within the boundaries of a time, place, or groups (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, the focus of case study research is analyzing one group, individual, or organization (Saldana & Omasta, 2018), which applied to the study and examination of the perceptions of student-athletes and athletic coaches at various universities. Case study research is often useful for analyzing holistic perceptions of participants within a single-case or multiple-case (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2014) while generating new ideas and insight to inform best practices (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). To understand the impact team participation has on followership development, a multi-site case study, or collective case study, was employed by examining student-athletes participating on collegiate athletic teams at various institutions.

In addition to case study research, the researcher utilized a phenomenological approach, to explore the experience of multiple coaches and athletes. The purpose of the study was to examine an experience and better understand the impact athletic participation has had on followership development. Bloomberg and Volpe (2018) described phenomenological studies as creating the opportunity to divulge meaning from participants' perceptions of a shared experience. Further, the researcher's aim in phenomenological studies is often to understand a participant's thoughts to provide a framework for how experiences can shape the world (Vagle, 2014). Due to the desire to understand how student-athletes and coaches believe their experiences within athletics contribute to the development of their followership skills, it was imperative that phenomenology elements be present within the study.

Ultimately, the combined use of case study and phenomenological research design was appropriate for this study to understand better influencing factors, habits, and assertions relating to the development of followership within team participants at the specific sites. Using a multi-case study allowed for a thorough examination of patterns within teams that impacted followership development. Additionally, a multi-case phenomenological study of followership development could lead to outlining impactful experiences, events, and activities that contribute to followership development. Many researchers exploring student-athlete development have utilized qualitative case study research (Chartier et al., 2021; Forester et al., 2020; Woltring et al., 2021). Additionally, others have utilized phenomenological approaches to explore student-athlete experiences (Bjornsen & Dinkel, 2017; Engelke & Frederickson, 2022). Therefore, this researcher employed a qualitative multi-case phenomenological study approach to examine the student-athlete and coaches' perception of how athletic participation has contributed to followership development.

Previous researchers have indicated a gap between understanding sports participation and life skills development (Chartier et al., 2021; do Nascimento Junior et al., 2021). To explore how followership is developed through the involvement of sports participation, an examination of team participants who have

experienced growth in their followership skills was necessary. Although phenomenological studies often utilize interviews as the only data source, one data source is insufficient for a case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, the data sources for the current study included organizational documents and individual interviews with student-athletes and coaches at two institutions. The sampling of student-athletes included member(s) of the student-athlete from various sports teams. The sampling of athletic coaches included head coaches with multiple years of experience as collegiate head coaches.

Analyzing department documents such as student-athlete handbooks, program goals, and program outcome expectations was necessary for the case study because documents often reflect those who created the document's values, intentions, and perspectives (Saldana & Omasta, 2018). In the current study, the researcher used interview discussions with coaches to gain better understanding of followership development because of the rich content and participant perspective that, according to Bloomberg and Volpe (2018), is often captured during interviews. Though interviews are a primary data source for case studies, they are also a tool to enhance the shared ideas of participants (Saldana & Omasta, 2018). However, to ensure the saturation and validity of data (Creswell & Poth, 2018), the researcher prioritized two data sources for the current case study: interviews and document review. Using multiple forms of data allowed for the triangulation of data, which, according to Creswell and Poth (2018), is where the researcher corroborates evidence from multiple data sources to validate the outcomes of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Participants

Selecting participants for the current study first required that cases be selected (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the current study, the researcher examined multiple collegiate athletes and coaches to thoroughly explore the development of followership among student-athletes. The case selection process involved seeking approval from athletic directors and exploring convenient team access. The priority in sample selection was gaining access to intercollegiate coaches and student-athletes from colleges that exhibit a similar student-body size and athletic

involvement. Upon request, two small, private liberal arts colleges in the upstate New York region agreed to participate in this study.

Upon selecting the cases, collegiate athletic departments in the upstate New York area, gaining access and credibility with team members was imperative. The researcher's experiences as a student or employee at the participating colleges and the support of each institution's athletic director helped gain access to these institutions. All participating institutions provided student-athlete handbooks relating to student-athlete leadership and development program requirements. The expected number of participants in student-athlete interviews was at least three student-athletes from each institution. The researcher selected athletic coaches for interviews based on their availability and desire to be involved and hoped that the interviewees would consist of at least two head coach participants from each institution. Eligible student-athletes and coaches received background information about the study and the construct of followership. Study participants were notified of informed consent (Appendix A), which was collected before the interview.

The selection of participants for this study is best described as purposeful selection (Creswell & Poth, 2018) because participants' selection was based on not only due to their involvement in athletics but also, as Saldana and Omasta (2018) suggested, their ability to provide meaningful information relating to the research purpose (Saldana & Omasta, 2018). Moreover, the selected participants were a minimum of 18 years old. Additionally, student-athlete participants had to be actively participating in intercollegiate athletics, whereas coach participants had to be coaching a varsity, intercollegiate athletic team. Preference for student-athlete participation was given to student-athletes with additional years of collegiate athletic experience and no formal leadership roles within their collegiate athletic experiences (i.e., captainships). For coach participants, preference was given to participants with higher years of head coach and assistant coaching experience at the collegiate, high school, and age group levels. Bloomberg and Volpe (2018) outlined the importance of selecting participants for qualitative research that align with the purpose of the study and the research questions. For this reason, the researcher selected participants for the current study based on meeting specific

criteria to aid in the richness of the study, frame the importance of the athlete's perspective, and gather the perspectives of those who have lived the same experiences.

Ethical Considerations

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), researchers must maintain an ethical standard to protect participants. Researchers make ethical considerations to ensure a high level of integrity for the research being conducted (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Specifically, participants' identities and objectivity must be protected to guard against misuse and maintain trust (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Ethical issues must be considered at every stage of the research process from the beginning, during the data collection phase, and when reporting results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The recommended precautions relating to ethical issues were taken while preparing and conducting research for the current study. The researcher received the approval to conduct the current study from all college administrations and permission from participants, conducted research in areas that did not allow power issues, and provided credit for any work completed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher described the purpose of the study and the research design in detail to all participants and did not coerce participants to participate or share information. Participants could leave the study anytime, which is consistent with Creswell and Poth's (2018) ethical guidelines. The researcher remained neutral during collection and analysis and kept any personal opinions from the discussion. Lastly, participants' identities remain confidential, and all data have been stored on password-protected computers to ensure that shared thoughts, opinions, and comments remain anonymous.

Data Collection

The focus for phenomenological research is primarily on data collection through interview discussion, where participants can openly share their experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). Meanwhile, case study research is often associated with comprehensive data collection and analysis, including the collection of

multiple data sources (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Terrell, 2016). Bloomberg and Volpe (2018) advised that case study research be "extensive" (p. 50) and include multiple sources of data. Further, data collection methods must align with the research questions to ensure that the collected data provides insight into the questions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). Therefore, the researcher employed document review and interviews to thoroughly conduct a multi-case phenomenological research design.

Document Review. Recognizing document review as a primary data collection source of qualitative research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018), it is important to include documents in the collective case study analysis. For the current study, the researcher collected documents, including student-athlete handbooks, from athletic directors of each college upon request. Generally, student-athlete handbooks describe team member expectations and the intended outcome of team activities. Overall, the purpose of the document review for the current study was to examine leadership's intentions relating to the development of student-athletes while providing insight into the research questions relating to how athletic participation generates followership skills and what components of team participation lead to followership.

Interviews. The most common data source for qualitative analysis is semi-structured individual interviews due to the richness of data that can be extracted from individual discussions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). Moreover, interview discussions allow the researcher to understand the participants' perceptions through specific questions and storytelling (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). For the current study, the researcher framed interview questions to best align with the written research questions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Saldana & Omasta, 2018). To further examine how athletic participation generates followership skills, the interview questions were clear and open-ended to allow for explanation and further description from participants. Additionally, questions are asked to "evoke conversation" (Krueger & Casey, 2015, p. 41), which, for the current study, centered on participants' descriptions of team characteristics, activities, or experiences they believe have developed from followership. Ultimately, asking key

questions helped focus the interview on followership development, team characteristics, followership skill transfer, and team success.

Data Analysis

The data collection methods for the current study were document review and interviews. With multiple data collection forms, data analysis must be organized for ease of access and review. The researcher used Creswell and Poth's (2018) recommendation of the data analysis spiral to ensure systematic data collection and analysis.

The purpose of the qualitative study was to explore how followership is developed among collegiate-level student-athletes by analyzing athletic department documents and participant remarks, discussions, and shared ideas. The researcher organized the data using files and folders for each form of data collection and used Otter.ai to transcribe any verbal data, such as interview discussions. Complete transcriptions, department documents, and researcher notes were saved and imported into Microsoft Excel for the purpose of sorting, organizing, and analyzing textual data.

To analyze data, inductive, or ground-up, coding is the primary method for code development from the data rather than predetermined codes (Saldana, 2021). Next, using in vivo coding ensured participants' thoughts and perceptions were captured, as recommended by Creswell and Poth (2018). With further coding and additional reading of the data reads, a more deductive form of coding was used to align participants' thoughts, perceptions, and ideas (Saldana, 2021). A value coding system aided in categorizing codes into categories, which emerged into common themes throughout the data.

Data analysis was systematic and sequential and began with multiple reads, memoing of notes, reflective thoughts, or potential code development in accordance with Creswell and Poth's (2018) guidelines. Throughout the coding process, the researcher paid attention to the frequency of mentioned concepts, how extensive participants shared about certain concepts, how much passion was shared, specific details, and participants' overall perceptions following Bloomberg and Volpe (2015) recommendations. A codebook was maintained in Microsoft Excel,

outlining emerging themes and the relationship of codes with categories and themes.

To analyze the data of the current study, the researcher used a thematic analysis, a primary method for data analysis in this study, to review, categorize, and align the information shared with similar concepts and research questions as recommended by Creswell and Poth (2018). This step involved reading the text transcript and notes multiple times throughout the data analysis process.

Categorical aggregation and thematic coding (Creswell & Poth, 2018) are useful analysis steps completed in this study, which involved reading the transcripts and noting memos or codes.

Line-by-line readings of the transcript involved assigning codes or notes to various thoughts and ideas shared by participants. The researcher used thematic analysis to align the data with other relative data and the research questions by reading the transcript multiple times. Arranging coded items based on salient themes followed to create categories of the data. Overall themes emerged from these categories, which guided the discussion of the data.

Scope and Limitations

The aim of the current study was to explore followership development among student-athletes. The scope of the multi-site case study focused on collegiate student-athletes and coaches participating in varsity athletics at two different universities. The primary goal was to understand how sport participation impacts followership development. The study was limited by assuming participants respond truthfully during interview discussions. Further, limitations of the study occurred from the variety of prior leadership and development involvement by current study participants. Lastly, the study results only represented a small portion of college athletics and, therefore, could be limited.

Definition of Terms

Athlete leadership refers to when individuals occupy a formal or informal role within a team that ignites influence to achieve common goals while motivating other team members (Loughead et al., 2006).

Effective followership is follower behaviors that enable teamwork, advance organizational goals, support leaders, and influence others to work toward organizational change (Jiang et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2020; Uhl-Bien & Carsten, 2018; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014; Young et al., 2020).

Followership is the acceptance and dedication from individuals toward the purpose and goals of an organization or the organization's leader (Carsten & Uhl-Bien, 2012; Gilstrap & Morris, 2015; Hamlin, 2016; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014).

Followership development is the intentional instruction and development of leadership and followership skills that guide individuals in practicing effective followership skills (Nurhadi, 2020; Rahaman & Read, 2020; Young et al., 2020)

Leadership is a mindset assumed by individuals that enacts affective change, motivates them to achieve results, and empowers an individual to influence groups to achieve common goals (Northouse, 2016).

Leadership development is the reflection of self and the application of experience. Leadership development requires understanding who one's followers are and adjusting strategies to create influence and motivate followers to work towards a common goal (Avolio, 2005).

Student-athlete, for this study, is a college student enrolled in at least 12 academic credit hours and fully eligible for athletic participation at Division I, II, or III levels (National College Athletic Association, n.d.b).

Student-athlete development is the utilization or implementation of programming that focuses on enhancing the life skills of student-athletes through individual identity exploration, mentorship, leadership development, and career development (Chartier et al., 2021; do Nascimento Junior et al., 2021; Jolly et al., 2020).

Team members, for this study, are defined as any participants listed on the official team roster, including coaches and student-athletes.

Summary

With an increasing call to reverse the lens of well-understood leadership theories and leadership development practices (Khan et al., 2020; Shamir, 2007), the researcher investigated followership development among student-athletes.

Many have argued that effective followership creates the framework for team fluidity and overall success (Foley, 2015; Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2020; Peters & Haslam, 2018; Schuder, 2016). Further, followership characteristics often translate to effective leadership ability (Smith et al., 2017). Moreover, athletics creates the perfect opportunity to explore followership development among many individuals (Chartier et al., 2021; do Nascimento Junior et al., 2021).

Recognizing the value followership has within the context of team dynamics, the intentional development of followership skills could be vital to continued team success (Imholte et al., 2019; Lyons, 2015; Wallace & Shipherd, 2020). In the current study, the researcher applied a multi-site case study approach to understand followership development among student-athletes better. The study results could facilitate student-athlete development, guide administrators and coaches toward new development opportunities, and build effective followership within participating members' teams. Ultimately, the current study has broadened the scope of followership development among college athletes.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

With limited research on followers' contributions to leadership, teamwork, and the development of individuals (Carsten & Uhl-Bien, 2012), continued exploration of followership is necessary. Further, the development of student-athletes is often explored (Duguay et al., 2016), yet the role followers play within teams is under-researched. This chapter includes an exhaustive literature review relating to followership, followership characteristics, followership development, and the impact of followers within groups. Additionally, this literature review will cover the context of student-athletes and ways in which participation can enhance teamwork abilities and personal skills.

Followership

Followership as a theory is a growing construct many have begun to define through various lenses. As early as the 1940s, Follett (1949) made the call to examine the role of followers when discussing leadership and group dynamics. The early definition of followership by Kelley (1988) suggested that followership was the idea that organizational success resulted from leaders and followers. As research continued, Chaleff (2009) argued that followers should be courageous and should not be viewed as subordinates. Conversely, Townsend and Gebhardt (1997) described followership as a process where subordinates recognize their role and take orders from leaders. However, others began to argue that followers are part of the process (Gardner et al., 2005) of effective leadership and that oftentimes followers change places and become leaders (Rost, 1995).

Others have examined followership as a role within the process of shared leadership. Specifically, Kelley (1988) suggested that followers contribute to organizational success or failure and are generally independent. Meanwhile, Uhl-Bien et al. (2014) described the role of followers as a component of a hierarchical leadership process. Conversely, Shamir (2007) argued that followers are co-contributors and equally as important as leaders in achieving goals. Ultimately, understanding followership is critical within the leadership process. As stated by Bastardo and Van Vugt (2019), “there can be no leaders without followers” (p. 1).

Therefore, examining various followership characteristics, followership development, and the impact followers have within groups is necessary.

Theoretical Development of Followership

Several researchers have explored the various constructs of leadership, leadership development, effective leadership qualities, and even non-effective leadership qualities. Uhl-Bien et al. (2014) suggested that the exploration of the follower at the forefront of the leadership process is limited. Kellerman (2008) indicated followership within leadership might have been considered an “insult” (p. 6), which often led to ignoring the role followers played all together. Meanwhile, Crossman and Crossman (2011) highlighted the transformation journey of followership from subordinate to an empowered leader. Although research on followership is lacking, the value of followers within teams is necessary for organizational success (Chaleff, 2009).

The development of followership within individuals is somewhat intrinsic, as individuals instinctively know how to follow (Agho, 2009). However, Crossman and Crossman (2011) argued that followership could be viewed as an influential process where roles are assumed. Moreover, researchers described followership as a mere stop on an individual’s leadership journey and could be considered the opposite of leadership (Crossman & Crossman, 2011). Critics of followership research have argued that foundational authors such as Kelley (1992) and Chaleff (2009) have worked from assumptions due to the lack of empirical research and examination (Crossman & Crossman, 2011). Regardless, early thoughts on the construct of followership have contributed to the development of empirical research and the continued examination of follower behaviors, characteristics, and contributions within teams.

Uhl-Bien et al. (2014) argued that leadership researchers primarily spoke of followers through the lens of leaders and mostly examined how followers received leaders’ influence. Therefore, Uhl-Bien et al. conducted a systematic literature review with the perspective of followers at the forefront with the hopes of beginning to increase followership theory research. In this review, they examined the historical growth of followership perception and ultimately made the call to

“reverse the lens” (Shamir, 2007, p. 13) to better present followers as contributors and leaders within teams and organizations.

As followership began to develop as a theory being discussed alongside leadership, Baker (2007) argued that no true historical foundation of the theory exists. Therefore, Baker conducted an empirical literature review by examining nearly 500 pieces of literature that give roots to the followership theory. The exhaustive literature review revealed that leadership has often been prioritized because heroism, idolization, and traditional organization hierarchy attracted attention. Social change throughout the 2000s contributed to the inclusion of followers; however, Baker concluded that followership is not a role that a single characteristic can define but rather a mentality that must be adopted within teams. Baker’s suggestions contributed to the current study by proving a basis for exploring the idea that followers fulfill organizational roles. Moreover, it was important to explore, examine, and understand what characteristics are necessary to fulfill the role of a follower before the development of followership can exist.

Chaleff (2009) outlined the characteristics of effective followers as collaborative, trustworthy, caring, self-starting, and interdependent on leaders (pp. 19-20). Chaleff summarized four types of followers: implementers, partners, resourceful, and individualists (p. 40). He went on to argue that all four follower styles contribute to productivity within teams. Chaleff spent a significant amount of time discussing the behavioral traits of leaders and followers and described behaviors that worked well together and behaviors that often fail when mixed. Ultimately, Chaleff presented a measure to determine the level of effective courageous followership within oneself, arguing that courage is necessary for effective followers. The measure, courageous followership, is one of the few existing measures useful for examining followership though it focuses solely on follower behaviors.

Reversing the Leader-Centric Point of View. Historical leadership research trended toward a leader-centric approach, focusing on leaders' qualities, traits, and contributions. Specifically, several researchers outlined the necessary traits for effective leadership, suggesting that effective followers practice skills on

the opposite spectrum of leadership traits (Dinh & Lord, 2012). Traits, such as dominant, assertive, high-energy, and noncompliance, were often considered critical to success as a leader (Bass & Bass, 2008). Moreover, early leadership theories often perceived followers in a negative light (Kelley, 1992; Zaleznik, 1965). Therefore, as effective leadership traits promoted hierarchical leadership, followers were perceived as weak, nonresistant, and compliant with leaders (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). In their early research, Yukl and Van Fleet (1992) described leaders as dominant players who could control and create an effect within an entire team. The leader-centric perspective strengthened the outdated stereotype that followers were weak, easily influenced, and obedient (Kelley, 1988).

Bjugstad et al. (2006) examined the various models of supporting followership and suggested that, to date, the models resulted in a leader-centric view of followership. The authors defined followership as the ability to follow, take direction, support leader initiatives, and contribute to the leader's ability to enhance a team. In their empirical literature review, Bjugstad et al. examined Kelley's model of followership (1992), suggesting that the behaviors Kelley (1992) described were rigid and did not account for how followers truly move from role to role. Next, they examined Hersey and Blanchard's (1982) theory of situational leadership, which included a summary of four leadership styles: telling, selling, participating, and delegating. The purpose of Bjugstad et al.'s paper was to integrate Kelley's model of followership with Hersey and Blanchard's theory. In doing so, Bjugstad et al. uncovered three emergent themes of follower motivation, follower values and trust, and characteristics of followers. However, the development of the three themes still led to a leader-centric view of followership, as Bjugstad et al. indicated that effective followers are a function of leadership.

Cox et al. (2010) challenged the misconception that leaders must be authoritarian and carry institutional authority, and are the most important factors in organizational success. Cox et al. argued that while the literature suggests leaders are the main influence on outcomes, formal leaders rarely have a strong impact on team outcomes. Others have supported the same argument, indicating that leaders

cannot exist without followers (Van Vugt et al., 2008) and that followers create more influence than leaders (Shamir, 2007),

Ultimately, researchers have been suggested that historical literature on the study of leadership could be recategorized as the study of leaders, as not all players in the leadership process have been examined (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Recognizing the contributions of followers within the leadership process (Shamir, 2007), researchers began to widen their perspectives on the players within the leadership process to better understand the contributions of followers. The increased lens on followers was the first step in moving away from a leader-centric point of view.

Discovering a Follower-Centric Point of View. To promote the influence of followers while maintaining a follower-centric point of view, it is important to eliminate any perception of hierarchical relationships within the leader-follower dynamic (Cox et al., 2010). Early in followership development, Meindl et al. (1985) began to challenge common top-down hierarchical leadership theories. Specifically, Meindl et al. prioritized charismatic leaders who created influence over followers to become contributors. Moreover, their focus on followers becoming independent and contributing to success highlighted the importance of heroic leaders who allow followers to thrive. Ultimately, Meindl et al.'s work is perceived as follower-centric because the focus was on how leaders influenced followers to create opportunity, effectively co-work, and ultimately impact teams.

Though the focus has so heavily been on the leader, a leader's actions, and the impact a leader makes to change groups and teams, Kellerman (2008) pressed that the focus should lie on the followers. However, it is important to examine not only who followers are but also what followers are doing and to what extent their actions affect change. Cox et al. (2010) suggested that a follower-centric approach through the application of cooperative leadership could transform perceptions of leadership. Furthermore, organizations began to recognize the importance of group cohesion on outcomes, which Cox et al. (2010) indicated is only possible with a group-based leadership style, where leaders and followers co-exist and share authority.

Developing and promoting a follower-centric point of view first began with the awareness of transformational leadership, which promotes collaboration between followers and leaders (Cox et al., 2010). Khan et al. (2020) suggested that even transformational leadership researchers had examined the role of the leader but left out the contributions of followers. Therefore, Khan et al. explored the impacts of transformational leadership through the eyes of the follower by examining how followers influence leaders and organizational outcomes. They conducted a quantitative analysis with over 500 participants from Pakistan, all of whom completed a questionnaire. The results of the analysis revealed that active engagement and independent critical thinking among followers were positively affected by transformational leadership experiences. Furthermore, Khan et al. indicated that further development of followership skills, specifically active engagement and independent critical thinking, could enhance leadership within teams.

Transformation of the Perception of Followership. Ultimately, the discussion of followership relates to leadership, and Kellerman (2008) argued that leadership and followership together should follow a “natural progression” (p. 239) as the theories interrelate. DeRue and Ashford (2010) argued that the popularity of hierarchical leadership styles is waning, which necessitates the promotion of followers within work groups. Cox et al. (2010) suggested that to promote a follower-centric perspective, leaders must begin to follow.

Baker et al. (2011) argued that followers are interdependent on leaders and that within teams, leaders and followers actually share roles. The outdated hierarchical organizational structure often suggests that leaders hold specific roles that are unachievable by followers. Further, past examination of followership has focused on the distinct roles leaders and followers hold, yet has failed to recognize that leaders and followers share roles within teams. Moreover, Baker et al. (2011) argued that the shared roles between followers and leaders most often relate to change, versatility, and flexibility as both “effective leaders and effective followers are engaged in change, which is inherent in organizations” (p. 346). Baker et al. conducted a quantitative study examining healthcare industry workers.

The study recruited 493 workers, though only 212 participated. The measure for examination was a survey that combined the leadership self-inventory practices (Kouzes & Posner, 2003) to examine leadership dimensions and the performance and relationship questionnaire (Rosenbach et al., 1997) to examine individual followership behaviors. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis revealed that the process of effective followership overlaps with the characteristics of good leaders. Moreover, the study revealed that followership behaviors of challenging the process, enabling action, collaborating, and embracing change significantly overlapped with leadership behaviors, indicating that leaders and followers share roles.

Top-down hierarchical leadership styles have continued to fade in popularity within teams and organizations as people have begun to recognize the inclusion of followers in the leadership process as inputting value. However, an examination of how leaders and followers interact and build relationships to lead organizations effectively is lacking (DeRue & Ashford, 2010). Further, leaders have historically been viewed as one-directional, though a multi-directional perspective must be realized when promoting a follower-centric mindset. DeRue and Ashford (2010) presented a theory to deconstruct an individual's identity as either a leader or a follower and defined the leadership identity construct. Next, the authors outlined a process for individuals to claim a piece of each identity and suggested praise be used to support individuals identifying claims. Further, the authors discussed contributing factors for individual characteristic claims that comprise leaders and followers. Ultimately, the findings of DeRue and Ashford's work indicated that followers often consciously decide to give up the role of leader to assume the follower's identity, recognizing the need for the role to be fulfilled.

Ultimately, as followership has progressed throughout the past 40 years, the characteristics of followership have been transformed, and the contributions of followers are better understood. Table 1 exemplifies the transformation of followership behaviors from Kelley's (1992) examination of early perceptions of how leadership theories viewed followers to Ndonye's (2022) recent analysis of followership behaviors.

Table 1*Transformation of Perceived Followership Behaviors*

Authors	Followership Characteristics
Kelley (1992)	Passive, conforming, compliant, subordinate
Kellerman (2008)	Participants, supporters, hard workers
Chaleff (2009)	Collaborative, trustworthy, caring, self-starting, interdependent
Cox et al. (2010)	Decisive, trusting, visionary, enabling
Carsten et al. (2010)	Team player, positive attitude, proactive, opinionated, dependable
Baker et al. (2011)	Hard-working, collaborative, flexible, challenger
Ndonye (2022)	Influential, motivated, active, participatory

Followership Characteristics

As followership began to develop as a theory being discussed within leadership, Baker (2007) argued that no true historical foundation of the theory exists. Therefore, Baker conducted an empirical literature review by examining nearly 500 pieces of literature that give roots to the followership theory. The exhaustive literature review revealed that leadership has often been prioritized because heroism, idolization, and traditional organization hierarchy attracted attention. Social change throughout the 2000s contributed to the inclusion of followers; however, Baker concluded that followership is not a role that a single characteristic can define but rather a mentality that must be adopted within teams. Baker's suggestions contributed to the current study by providing a basis for exploring the idea that followers fulfill organizational roles. Moreover, it was important to explore, examine, and understand what characteristics are necessary to effectively fulfill the role of a follower before the development of followership can exist.

To continue to define and describe followers, Carsten et al. (2010) argued that limited research on the construct of followership existed. Moreover, definitions of followership varied based on the beliefs and contexts of various authors. Carsten

et al. conducted a qualitative case study to examine the definitions and perceptions of being a follower. The researchers employed interviews with individuals who held the role of followers and examined how subordinates within organizations defined followership. Throughout interview discussions, they prioritized understanding the participant's beliefs on defining true followership.

The process of data analysis led to emergent themes relating to social construction, personal qualities, and contextual influences (Carsten et al., 2010). Regarding social construction, they discovered that perceived beliefs on how passive or nonpassive a follower should be were the foundation for individual followers' roles. For example, passive followers often believed their role was to be less than a leader and have minimal responsibility. Conversely, active followers described their perception as being involved, contributing to decision-making, and having authority. When investigating the theme of personal qualities, they deconstructed nine codes from the data that could be used as characteristics of followership: team player, positive attitude, proactive behavior, expressing opinions, obedience, flexibility, dependability, mission conscience, and integrity. In addition to understanding how perception dictates the role of followers and listing followership characteristics, the data analysis also revealed that an individual's definition of followership varied dependent on the influence of a leader. Specifically, participants described that contributing as a follower was easier when leaders empower individuals and promote a healthy environment. Meanwhile, participants described as a struggle to co-create alongside authoritarian leaders. Carsten et al.'s findings provide significant clarity on the characteristics of followership while also describing leadership behaviors that promote followership.

Even though it is evident through literature that leadership is a relational process between leaders and followers (DeRue & Ashford, 2010), the focus on the followers' identity within the interactional relationship has not been prioritized (Larsson & Nielsen, 2021). Larsson and Nielsen (2021) examined the identity of a follower by conducting a qualitative study of 52 business meetings. They reviewed excerpts from business meetings with specific attention paid to how self-identifying followers interacted with leaders within the meetings. The study's results revealed

that many followers perceived great concern about being too authoritative or overbearing. Larsson and Nielsen's emergent themes contrast with Carsten et al.'s (2010) claim that followers should be authoritative and proactive. Ultimately, the concerns that emerged from followers within the study could be mitigated with a better-appropriated form of leadership and increased interactions between leaders and followers, as suggested by Uhl-Bien and Carsten (2018) and Carsten et al. (2010).

Ndonye (2022) examined followership characteristics and suggested that the role of followership behaviors in the leadership process and organizational outcomes is overlooked. They conducted a systematic literature review to examine how followers' behaviors, traits, and characteristics impact the leadership process and organizational outcomes. In the review, Ndonye examined 26 peer-reviewed journal articles written within five years, from 2017 to 2022. After thoroughly examining all the articles and a thematic organization of topics, traits, and behaviors, Ndonye proposed a new conceptual framework. Specifically, the researcher suggested that influence and motivation are two leading characteristics identified throughout the literature as necessary for followers to positively impact the leadership process and organizational outcomes. Recognizing how critical influence and motivation are for effective followership adds to constructing a follower's identity, which was needed for the current study. Furthermore, these traits provide an opportunity to outline detailed components of effective followers.

Peters and Haslam (2018) discovered that primary followership research continually overlooked how self-identity impacts an individual's ability to follow. They conducted a study examining how individuals who identify as leaders might emerge when the opportunity arises. Additionally, they argued that followership is a mindset and an individual's self-perception is what categorizes them as either a leader or follower. They quantitatively examined three scales relating to a leader and follower identity. Participants included 218 Royal Marine recruits from the United Kingdom. All participants were male due to the ban on women in the military at the time of the study. The findings of the study indicated that an individual's identity as a leader or follower contributes to their ability to emerge as

an effective leader. Specifically, individuals who self-identified as leaders were more often recognized as leaders by their peers than those who self-identified as followers. However, both self-identified leaders and followers effectively emerged as leaders when the opportunity arose. Ultimately, the self-identification of both leaders and follower contributes to enhancing the understanding of followership behaviors.

Followership Development

Many authors have begun discussing the importance of followers in relation to leadership. However, few researchers have examined effective ways to develop followership among individuals (Thompson et al., 2021). Thompson et al. (2021) suggested that follower development could include creating follower-inclusive environments. Moreover, others examined individual experiences and reflections on leading followers and shared best practices for creating effective followers (Finlayson, 2021; Read, 2021). Ultimately, understanding how to develop followership within groups and teams is necessary to further develop the construct and create more effective and cohesive groups.

Effective followership has been cited to increase performance within organizations from 17% up to 43% (Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2015). Recognizing the impact that the performance increases of this magnitude could have on an organization, Hurwitz and Hurwitz (2020) called for increasing followership education and development within corporations. They discovered that knowledge of followership among groups is lacking and suggested that training begins with introductions to the term and the theory. Moreover, presenting followership material should be done in various ways to ensure that participants with different learning preferences can understand the importance of followership. After conducting training, Hurwitz and Hurwitz discovered that to effectively contribute as a follower, individuals must first understand their role as a follower. Additionally, understanding the role of the follower often leads to empowerment and the desire to continue to enhance followership skills. An increase in the desire to understand followership was credited to the term *following* used by social media platforms that eliminated common negative connotations with followers.

Ultimately, Hurwitz and Hurwitz's recommendations and outlines for followership development contribute to the current study by providing a framework for followership development while solidifying the importance of continued improvement.

Armstrong (2021) identified followership as an opportunity for leaders within sports to promote healthy team dynamics and indicated that behaviors practiced within athletic teams could be applied within organizations. The examination of theories of followership combined with personal experiences led to the emergence of shared characteristics between team involvement and effective followership. Specifically, Armstrong argued that successful sports teams must exhibit a culture that promotes personal development, collaboration, and team cohesion to ensure success. Further, the same three characteristics contribute to increasing athletic experiences and developing followership within individuals. Ultimately, Armstrong suggested that the nature of athletics, which develops personal grit, promotes teamwork, and requires cohesion, creates the perfect sample for followership examination. Moreover, Armstrong outlined practical ways for leaders to develop followership by prioritizing the follower through personal goal setting, year-end reviews, multi-level collaboration, and continued training.

Bufalino (2018) highlighted the importance of understanding how followership contributes to effective leadership. Although organizations recognize the importance of leadership, many are starting to see that effective leadership is not the only solution to organizational success. Rather, effective followers are necessary for continued growth. Bufalino developed a training tool to be used for leaders and followers during team workshops, training sessions, or onboarding that prioritizes active followership. In addition, the tool contained information on followership for participants and methods for ensuring healthy engagement between leaders and followers, developing follower self-awareness, and building appreciation for the role of followership. Recognizing that followership is a requirement of leadership, Bufalino created a training tool to integrate leadership and followership training. Moreover, the development of followership required innovative thinking, which the training tool also required. Training tools such as

Bufalino's fictional case study application could contribute to developing followership across organizations. Prioritizing the understanding of follower contributions and the development of followership characteristics could lead to improved leadership, increased organizational efficacy, and increased work environment.

Followership development by itself is not often considered or practiced; discussions are held within the boundaries of leadership development. Grant et al. (2021) examined followership development independently by creating the followership intelligence activity (FIA). The FIA activity was designed to be conducted in small groups within a workshop setting to explore followership just as others might explore leadership, promote followership, and guide participants on a reflective self-journey as followers. The questions asked within the FIA contribute to an increased understanding of followership and ways individuals fulfill the role of follower.

The FIA includes a requirement for participants to work independently to self-reflect on five questions relating to followership (Grant et al., 2021). In the first question, participants are required to describe followership. The intention for this question is to gather participants' preconceived opinions and biases relating to followership. The next question in the FIA is related to whether participants consider themselves followers, which often prompts them to recognize their role as a follower that they likely were unaware of previously. The third question, "How do people learn to follow?" (Grant et al., 2021, p. 194), is accompanied by other inquiries relating to strong followership versus obedience. Responses to this question vary and often are dictated by the individual's perception, as Carsten et al. (2010) discovered in an earlier study. Next, participants are asked to reflect on behaviors and actions they have observed, practiced themselves, or believe in summing to good followership (Grant et al., 2021). This question challenges participants to reflect on leaders' behaviors and identify the characteristics of leaders that make it easy and challenging to follow. The purpose of inquiring about leaders is to inform participants that exemplary followership often requires exemplary leadership. The questions prompted by the FIA could contribute

significantly to the current study by creating the framework for the interview protocol used during data collection.

Finlayson (2021) examined various theoretical components contributing to a better understanding of followership. Furthermore, Finlayson presented a group activity first practiced at the 2019 global followership conference, in which Finlayson challenged group members to identify and rate exemplary follower traits. The author introduced group activity, followership pizza, to the group as an opportunity to assess followership traits together. In this activity, Finlayson asked participants to select and rate eight traits that organizations should prioritize when hiring or developing followership among employees. Next, group members would self-reflect and assign a rating for each of the eight traits. Lastly, group members would combine results to determine the top 10 most desired traits when assessing for exemplary followership.

Six groups participated in the group activity at the global followership conference, resulting in 60 exemplary followership traits. Finlayson (2021) then categorized the top traits and sorted them based on the frequency and mean to develop a list of exemplary followership characteristics rated from most important to least important. The results were as follows: “(a) committed to the organization, (b) curious/inquisitive researcher, (c) highly accountable, (d) life-long learner, (e) high discernment/judgment, (f) strong influencer, (g) solid implementer, (h) highly engaged, (i) strategic thinking partner, and (j) critical thinker” (Finlayson, 2021, p. 181).

Based on the theoretical analysis and review of the various traits identified as characteristics of exemplary followers, Finlayson (2021) outlined various proposed initiatives. The specific initiatives included opportunities for employees to grow within their jobs, embedded opportunities for self-reflection and development, and increased questioning relating to exemplary followership traits before hiring. Furthermore, increased efforts with employee onboarding and training that promote critical thinking and teamwork could further develop a follower-inclusive environment. Lastly, Finlayson suggested that team leaders be

trained on exemplary followership skills to model the behaviors desired from employees.

Followership within Groups

The theory of followership is becoming more integrated into leadership theory, research, development, and application. However, Carsten and Uhl-Bien (2012) argued that despite efforts to better understand followership, an examination of the construct through the lens of the follower is lacking in the literature. Specifically, significant research has focused on the leader's perception of followership. To combat this trend, the duo conducted a quantitative study by soliciting feedback from 206 participants who responded to survey questions that included six different measures. The results of the study supported earlier qualitative findings of Carsten et al.'s (2010). Specifically, Carsten and Uhl-Bien found a significant positive relationship between followers' voices, constructive resistance, and the ability to co-produce. Although the results of the study varied from the original hypotheses, it was evident that when followers were equal contributors or worked as a team with leaders, organizational success was higher. The authors' findings contribute to the current study by highlighting the importance of followers having a voice, challenging leaders, and being co-producers within the organization or team context. Additionally, the findings contributed to mitigating misconceptions that followers are subordinate, compliant, and thoughtless.

Bastardo and Van Vugt (2019) indicated the importance of examining the impact followers have on leaders and groups by declaring that "there can be no leaders without followers" (p. 1). In this empirical review of the history of followership, Bastardo and Van Vugt examined followers within groups, followership characteristics, and followership styles. Ultimately, they discovered that followership is a voluntary process within groups and should not be declared as obedience. Additionally, the literature examination revealed that followers often mimic and recreate the behaviors and characteristics of learned behaviors from leaders. Recognizing that followership theory is continuing to evolve, the concept that followership styles result from the interactions between leaders and followers

contributed to the current study. Specifically, the question if effective followers are only developed when effective leadership exists was derived from this research.

Due to the importance of work engagement on organizational success, leaders often focus on enhancing work engagement through organizational change, promotion, and motivation (du Plessis & Boshoff, 2018). However, du Plessis and Boshoff suggested that work engagement be examined through followers' perspectives to better understand how employees could contribute to increased work engagement. The duo conducted a quantitative factor analysis with participants from both the health sector and the mining industry in South Africa. With over 900 participants in total, du Plessis and Boshoff used multiple measures relating to work engagement, psychological capital, followership, and authentic leadership to examine factors of work engagement. Ultimately, the findings revealed that authentic leadership, psychological capital, and followership were the most significant influences on work engagement. Work engagement included the desire to be present within an organization or team. Recognizing the significant relationship between followership and work engagement, the findings of du Plessis and Boshoff contributed to a further understanding of followers' contributions within groups.

Although leadership theories began to recognize followers' important role in leadership success, the idea of psychological empowerment has been overlooked. Specifically, Van Dierendonck and Dijkstra (2012) described how leaders are meant to motivate and empower followers, yet limited research on key elements of effectively empowering followers exists. Moreover, leaders are often assigned the follower role, yet Van Dierendonck and Dijkstra argued that there is a multi-directional influence of empowerment between leaders and followers. Van Dierendonck and Dijkstra conducted this study using a longitudinal field study. They selected 212 officers from prisons within the Netherlands as participants in two waves of the study, which were held 3 months apart. The researchers used surveys relating to empowering leadership, as well as questions on employee empowerment. The results of the study indicated that as time goes on and team cohesion increases, a leader's empowerment behavior is related to a follower's

empowerment behavior. Moreover, Van Dierendonck and Dijkstra discovered that followers' influence on leaders was stronger than leaders' influence on followers. The results of their study indicated that followers provide significantly more empowerment than leaders, which was critical in understanding the role followers play within groups throughout the examination of the current study.

Hoption et al. (2012) suggested that researchers have misused followership to promote leader effectiveness while neglecting recognition of followers' important impact on groups overall. Therefore, Hoption et al. investigated the impact of the label follower on individuals within groups, teams, and workplaces. Hoption et al. conducted two quantitative studies to examine the label of followers and their impact on individuals working within groups. The first study had 154 undergraduate students who were all assigned the role of follower. Hoption et al. then instructed the participants to complete a survey that utilized various scales relating to perceived accuracy, role behaviors, and positive affect were included. The survey results suggested that the label *follower* had negative connotations for individuals and their self-perception. Further, the results of Hoption et al.'s first study supported the hypothesis, which suggested that being labeled a follower led to negative perceptions and less productivity.

Hoption et al. (2012) conducted a follow-up study to further examine followers by evaluating job-related behaviors and self-assigned roles within the workplace. The study had 348 participants, all of whom were employed and working within groups and teams. Hoption et al. administered the survey to the participants combined measures relating to self-labeled followership, job-related affective well-being, and extra-role behaviors. Ultimately, the second study revealed similar results to study one, indicating that the narrative of followers must be changed to ensure individuals who fulfill the role are productive. Hoption et al.'s findings contributed to the current study by highlighting the importance of prioritizing the role of followers, recognizing the value followers bring, and ensuring that the role of followers positively contributes to group success.

Leadership in Sports

Crozier et al. (2017) examined the differences in athlete leader behaviors among formal leaders, informal leaders, and followers. Specifically, Crozier et al. sought to understand if an athlete's leadership status differentiated their perceived and self-rated leadership behaviors within a team. They used a quantitative design to explore student-athletes and selected participants from an Ontario University athletic program. To analyze leadership behaviors, they required participants to complete the leadership scale for sport (LSS), which is a 40-item inventory that measures leadership actions, behaviors, and practices within the context of sports. The study's results supported the use of top-down leadership within athletic programs. Moreover, the study indicated that formal leaders utilized effective leadership behaviors more often than informal leaders. However, Crozier et al. discovered that informal leaders provide significant social support within teams, contributing to the overall team environment and effectiveness. Interestingly, athletes indicated that they frequently portrayed leadership behaviors despite being formal or informal leaders. The results of Crozier et al.'s study indicate that regardless of the assigned leadership role, participation in athletics often led to increased leadership behaviors by participants.

Düz and Aslan (2020) discovered that sports involvement heavily focuses on physical development with less attention on developing life skills. The researchers examined how high school students participating in sports excelled physically and individually in areas of teamwork, goal setting, emotional stability, and cognitive functioning. The sample included nearly 500 high school students from Turkey and surrounding regions. The life skills scale for sports (LSSS), developed by Açak and Düz (2018), was the primary data collection method. They conducted quantitative analysis using the Mann Whitney *U* and Kruskal Wallis *H* tests to analyze multiple comparisons. The results of the study indicated that sports involvement positively affected life skills. Furthermore, participants who had been involved in the sport longer had higher efficiency and goal-setting skills. Moreover, there was a significant positive correlation between year-round athletes and increased time management, goal setting, and teamwork abilities. Lastly, the

analysis revealed that student-athletes who trained more frequently had a higher emotional stability score than student-athletes who trained less often. Overall, the results of Düz and Aslan's study indicated that sports involvement provides life skills beyond physical development, including mental stability, cognitive functioning, time management, and teamwork.

Similar to Düz and Aslan's (2020) findings, Gellock et al. (2019) argued that athletes provide more than just a physical component to teams; they also provide social and emotional support. Therefore, Gellock et al. suggested that variation in leadership abilities within athletic teams is necessary. Gellock et al. examined athlete perceptions of various team member roles to further understand the importance of the variety of leadership roles within sports teams. This study was quantitative research, and the authors surveyed 30 athletic team members. The survey included questions that prompted players to rate their peers' leadership behaviors using a social network measurement on a Likert scale of 0 to 5. The survey results revealed that through the lens of team members, athletes who portray leadership behaviors strongly influence teams. Further, the study's results suggested that informal leaders and followers significantly influence the outcome of teams beyond formal leaders. The findings of Gellock et al. were critical in understanding the influence among sports teams and areas for continued development.

Loughead (2017) discovered that definitions relating to athlete leadership, peer leadership, and emergent leadership were lacking within the context of sports. Therefore, Loughead conducted an empirical literature review to better understand various theories surrounding leadership and measures to better examine athlete leadership. The author concluded that the differentiated transformational leadership inventory (DTLI) and the LSS were effective for examining leadership within athlete teams. However, measures for examining leader behaviors that positively impact a team are limited and need further examination. The use of the DTLI and LSS contributed to the current study because of they could be used to analyze informal leaders, or followers, within teams. Various results of the DTLI and LSS have indicated informal leaders prioritize the interests of others, value others' opinions, and mitigate their self-interest. Ultimately, the analysis of athlete leaders

provides a framework for the importance of examining informal leaders within teams to better understand the impact informal leaders have on the overall success of a team.

Pitts et al. (2018) recognized a need to better understand student-athlete-preferred leadership styles. The researchers used a quantitative design, and 758 student-athletes from nine universities participated. Similar to Loughhead (2017), Pitts et al. administered the LSS via an online platform to gather data. The results of the study indicated that female student-athletes preferred positive feedback, which the researchers attributed to closer relationships with coaches. Moreover, the analysis revealed that student-athletes often disapprove of autocratic behavior from leadership. Lastly, when analyzed by sport, Pitts et al. discovered that individual sports participants, such as swimming or cross country, preferred democratic leadership practices more than team-sport athletes. Leadership styles vary from coach to coach and amongst different teams. However, it is imperative that team leaders recognize and understand their participants' preferred styles to lead effectively. Additionally, Pitts et al. recommended that coaches and team leaders create an opportunity for shared leadership to allow team members to portray leadership behaviors to further understand leadership preferences amongst teammates.

Beyond understanding a student-athlete's preferred leadership style, Navarro and Malvaso (2015) argued that it is necessary to understand how student-athletes develop their leadership skills. Specifically, Navarro and Malvaso explored ways that student-athletes develop leadership skills within their sports that later contribute to life after sport. Moreover, the researchers examined how student-athletes developed leadership skills and transferred to life after the sport differently for men and women. Navarro and Malvaso conducted the study using a mixed-method design. First, they used a quantitative analysis to examine the differences between male and female student-athletes' experience as they develop leadership skills, transition from high school to college, build social networks, and motivate others. Next, they conducted a qualitative exploration to further explore the gender differences in teamwork and group activities. The researchers applied an

intervention where participants participated in leadership development programming, which was cited as contributing to self-lead leadership skills. Overall, the analysis revealed that both genders of student-athletes were fairly consistent in believing that mandatory participation and unproductive group work did not contribute towards leadership development. However, women preferred more interactive leadership opportunities, while male participants preferred self-directed activities. The results of the study indicated a need to apply leadership development from the top down and not just for brand new or incoming student-athletes. The participants believed the program effectively developed self-led leadership skills that could be applied beyond sports participation.

Monda et al. (2016) examined the Student-Athlete Leadership Academy (SALA) and the workshop's impact on increasing team leadership among formal and informal team leaders. The workshop aimed to educate participants on the importance of team leadership, provide leadership skills to high-school students, facilitate the understanding of transferable leadership skills beyond sports, create space for participants to develop ideas, and connect students with community leaders. The authors reviewed the workshop created by SALA (Student-Athlete Leadership Academy, n.d.) and provided a SWOT analysis of the workshop. Upon analysis, the strengths of the workshop included effective leader development and increased communication abilities. Monda et al. cited funding and limited access as challenges affecting the program. The strengths of the SALA (Student-Athlete Leadership Academy, n.d.) workshop highlighted the importance of examining followership efficacy on team leadership. Additionally, incorporating community members could contribute to examining transferrable skills beyond sport. Overall, Monda et al. argued that the leadership skills learned through participation in sports contribute to the productivity of individuals later in life, which necessitates increased opportunities for leadership development.

Student-Athlete Development

Recognizing the nature of collegiate athletics and the ability to provide student-athlete development within the context of sport, Navarro and Malvaso (2015) examined how student-athletes developed leadership skills to contribute to

both the sport and life after the game. Further, the researchers investigated differences between genders in the efficacy of developing self-leader skills and transitioning to life after sport. In this mixed-method study, Navarro and Malvaso (2015) began with quantitative analysis to investigate the gender differences in developing leadership skills, transitioning from high school to college, building networks, and the desire to take on leadership roles. In further analysis, they explored how student-athletes worked within group activities by applying leadership development workshops. The results between men and women were consistent and provided feedback that mandatory group work, unproductive group work, and forced teams were often nonproductive and of little value. However, it was evident from the analysis that women preferred interactive leadership opportunities such as group work, while men preferred self-directed activities. Ultimately, Navarro and Malvaso's study indicated the importance of applying continued leadership development beyond just first-year students and integrating mentoring programs to contribute to student-athlete leadership development. Further, the student-athletes recognized the program as being effective in helping to develop self-led leadership skills that would be applied outside of sports. In supporting the current study, Navarro and Malvaso's findings contributed to understanding the importance of the continued development of student-athletes while also providing the framework to reverse the lens from leadership development to followership development.

Forester et al. (2020) suggested that current academic support services for collegiate student-athletes are claimed to assist in developing student-athlete behavior but often miss the mark. Specifically, programming prioritizes time management, scheduling, and coursework, which are often areas of expertise for student-athletes. Forester et al. argued that the programs overlook a critical need to develop individual student-athletes' skills relating to life skills that they will carry beyond their time as a student, an athlete, and at the college. The researchers aimed to identify programming that could be offered to better enhance life skill development. Forester et al. conducted a qualitative case study using a phenomenological approach at a mid-major division one school. The study

included 23 participants who all identified as student-athletes and competed on various sports teams. The researchers employed five focus group discussions with five to six student-athletes participants each.

The results of the study revealed two emergent themes after analysis of the focus group discussions. The first theme, frustrations with current life skills programming, included subthemes of convenience factors, the relevance of programming, and nonsupportive staff. The second theme, suggested programming improvements, included topics such as productive mentoring, classroom topic choice, and transitioning from college to life. The need for enhanced development of student-athlete life skills relates to the topic of leadership because leadership is a life skill. Forester et al.'s findings relating to the value of mentorship, choice of a life skill topic, and transitioning away from college to the workplace are relevant to the area of followership development. Specifically, these skills must be learned and practiced in the classroom and on the field to ensure that effective leaders and followers are engaged in the workplace. The study's findings further illuminate the need for improvement in student-athletes' life skill development.

In a preliminary study analyzing the correlation between leadership development and team outcomes, Ohlson et al. (2022) conducted a quasi-experimental study with NCAA Division I student-athletes. Ohlson et al.'s primary goal was to explore the effects of leadership training on student-athletes and team outcomes. In this study, the researchers applied two interventions. They used the SAIL program within the institution, and student-athletes participated in leadership workshops, interacted with guest speakers, and discussed various development topics unique to them. Ultimately, they used the SAIL program to guide participants towards enhanced time management skills, build diversity awareness, and improve team collaboration. The second intervention, TSLS, involved one-on-one meetings between effective leaders and coaching staff. The meetings included leadership discussions, opportunities for growth, and self-reflection from participants. Ohlson et al. gathered pre- and post-intervention data, including team grade point averages (GPA), academic progress rates (APR), and graduation

success rates (GSR). They used Pearson correlations to examine the effect of the leadership interventions on overall GPA, APR, and GSR.

The results of Ohlson et al.'s (2022) study showed a positive change in team GPAs, APRs, and GSRs after participation in leadership intervention. Further, the analysis revealed that women saw increased benefits from leadership training. Specifically, two women's teams with the highest participation in the intervention also recorded the highest win percentages in the program's history. Additionally, team members were recognized for leadership roles such as coach of the year. Ultimately, the researchers provided a framework for further analysis of correlations between intentional student-athlete development, student-athlete success, and team outcomes. Furthermore, Ohlson et al. argued that the rigor of athletic teams provides "the ideal environment for effective leadership development and training" (p. 86), which is consistent with the purpose of the current study.

Followership Development among Teams

Historically, individual leadership has been idolized and heavily researched. Although many people still value the success of individual leaders, teams and organizations are trending toward shared leadership models. Shared leadership is often a result of increased tasks that one person cannot handle. Significant time has been spent exploring the dynamics of shared leadership with a focus on the effects of leadership. Baird and Benson (2022) suggested that it is necessary to understand team members' desire to participate in shared leadership, noting that limited research has explored the follower's perspective.

To investigate a follower's role in the shared leadership process, Baird and Benson (2022) examined the relationships between leaders and followers within teams that did not have formal leaders by conducting a quantitative study. Baird and Benson selected 405 undergraduate engineering students as participants and split them into 98 different teams. They measured effective leadership and effective followership using the relative percentile method on a 101-point sliding scale. Participants were given the definition and asked to rate the extent to which a teammate demonstrated the behavior. Further, Baird and Benson measured dyadic relationship conflict with a scale of 1 to 5, and asked participants to rate

relationship conflict with each of their team members. They performed various tests to examine team conflict, perspectives on shared leadership, and the role of followers. Initially, a bivariate analysis revealed that effective leadership within teams only exists when followership is present. Additionally, Baird and Benson analyzed the relationship between being an effective leader or follower and team dynamics. The analysis's results indicated that individuals rated as effective leaders or followers carry a reputation that allows for improved interpersonal relationships between team members. Lastly, they examined the relationship between effective leadership, followership, and team conflict. The analysis indicated that effective followership within a team often leads to less team conflict. However, the results did not support the hypothesis that effective team leadership could mitigate conflict. These findings support the importance of followership as a necessity to help reduce conflict within teams.

The findings support the early suggestions of many authors that leadership is a co-production (Shamir, 2007) and that leadership and followership must act in unison (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). Further, Baird and Benson (2022) indicated that effective teamwork must prioritize followership. Relating to the current study, these findings suggest that it is necessary for sports teams to mitigate team conflict while prioritizing cohesiveness, communication, and shared leadership. Therefore, the findings of Baird and Benson's study support the necessity of developing followership within athletes to reduce team conflict and increase team success.

Billsberry et al. (2018) examined the dynamics of leading and following within the boundaries of sports. Similar to claims by Kelley (1988), Bjugstad et al. (2006), and Uhl-Bien et al. (2014), Billsberry et al. (2018) argued that leadership research too often prioritized a leader-centric point of view while ignoring those being led. The outcome of leader behaviors is important, but Billsberry et al. suggested that understanding the viewpoint of observers, or followers, could be instrumental in the continued improvement of leadership practices. Billsberry et al. conducted a thorough literature review of leadership practices within the sport and outlined various implications for improving the sports environment. They examined observer-centric leadership, indicating that leadership is relational and

must be viewed as a social construct. Implications suggested by Billsberry et al. included improvement in recognizing leaders' influence on a group and a more in-depth understanding of leadership within the realm of sports. Moreover, Billsberry et al. suggested that followership skills within teams could be improved by a leader's ability to model effective followership.

Gottlieb et al. (2021) discovered that followership plays a heavy role in the element of sports. However, few researchers have examined challenge-oriented followership, which is often present when athletes and coaches interact. Benson et al. (2016) suggested that challenge-oriented followership within sports teams is present because of the influence some team members carry over the collective group, which could potentially mitigate the role of the coach. Ultimately, Gottlieb et al. suggested further analysis of a coach's perception of challenge-oriented followership to better understand shared leadership within sports. Gottlieb et al. arranged a quantitative intervention with the participation of 232 coaches who coached at various levels, from recreational to collegiate settings. Participants first completed a demographic questionnaire and then considered one of the eight assigned video vignettes, which were created for the purpose of the study. The videos portrayed athletes speaking up, challenging, and confronting a coach. The videos varied in the athlete's approach to conflict, the setting that the athlete spoke up on, and even the areas of context in which the athlete challenged the coach. After watching the assigned video, coaches completed a questionnaire to capture their perception of the interaction on the video.

The results of the study indicated that coaches perceived challenge-oriented followership as most effective when done in a one-on-one setting (Gottlieb et al., 2021). Further, the timing of the challenge-oriented followership interaction was critical, as coaches perceived more productive conversations when challenged before a decision was made. Ultimately, coaches were more inclined to consider the suggestions of teammates when challenges were done in private, not in front of the collective group, and before decisions were already made. The findings of the study indicated that followership is a necessary ingredient for successful teams. However, when understanding the relationship between leaders and followers, it is important

to recognize the importance of appropriately challenging leaders and to enact shared leadership in the right context. Specifically, Gottlieb et al.'s findings contributed to the current study by outlining the importance of followers respecting the role of leaders while still creating influence.

Alegbeleye and Kaufman (2022) argued that trends within the workplace require the ability to increase shared leadership and effective teamwork. In an effort to better understand the development of teamwork, the authors examined how team participants' effective leadership and followership traits contributed to the overall success of teams. They used a mixed-method design to examine transformational leadership and effective followership. The researchers first used quantitative methods, including surveying 84 college students assigned to 10 teams and currently enrolled in a leadership course. The survey included a combination of the team multifactor leadership questionnaire (Bass & Avolio, 1996) with Hoegl and Gemuenden's (2001) teamwork quality survey (TWQ). The results of the quantitative analysis led to the participation of two teams to participate in focus group discussions (Alegbeleye & Kaufman, 2022). The two teams represented the team that had the highest TWQ score and the team that had the lowest TWQ score. Questions asked within the focus group discussion were related to transformational leadership and team followership, including levels of influence, motivation, and support from team members. The study's findings revealed that teams with higher quality teamwork actively portrayed effective followership behaviors. Specifically, team members described each other as supportive, helpful, and encouraging. Further, teams with higher TWQ scores portrayed behaviors that resolved conflict quickly and were proactive in exhibiting followership behaviors. Meanwhile, teams with low TWQ scores reported passive followership abilities and decreased overall quality because of the lack of synergy. Alegbeleye and Kaufman suggested that teams are more productive and have greater team outcomes when team followership exists. Specifically, teams achieve higher productivity when team members are willing to step in and out of follower roles to better promote the outcomes of the whole group. Therefore, Alegbeleye and Kaufman's findings

contributed to the current study, as increased followership skills contribute to greater team outcomes.

Summary

After a thorough analysis of the literature on followership, it is evident that many scholars argue the need for continued exploration of followers' contributions to teamwork (Carsten & Uhl-Bien, 2012). Additionally, expanding the understanding of student-athlete development through the lens of followership is necessary to enhance teamwork (Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2020). Kellerman (2008) argued that leadership and followership must be examined together, which sets the framework for the interview protocol used in the current study. Additionally, the lack of understanding of followership skills and behaviors highlighted in the literature review became an outline to understand better how student-athletes and coaches perceive good followership. Ultimately, the exhaustive literature review on followership and student-athlete development set the framework for the structure of the current study's interviews and interview protocol. I hope that the current study will fill gaps in the literature identified throughout this review and provide an increased understanding of followership.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

The purpose of the current study was to understand the phenomenon of collegiate athletics and the influence participating in varsity sports has on an individual's followership development. The following research questions were the framework that guided the study:

- RQ₁: How do athletic participation experiences contribute to the participants' followership skills?
- RQ₂: How do student-athletes and coaches perceive the role of athletic participation in developing followership skills?
- RQ₃: How do student-athletes and coaches perceive the relationship between followership and leadership skills?
- RQ₄: How do the perceptions of coaches and student-athletes differ concerning the role of athletic participation in developing followership skills?

The remainder of this chapter contains details about the context of the study, the planned research methodology, research design and rationale, strategies for sample selection, data collection plans, and data analysis procedures.

Context of the Study

The participants in the current study included student-athletes and coaches at two private liberal arts institutions in New York State. Recognizing small schools as those that enroll 5,000 undergraduate students or less, approximately 20% of the campus population participated in collegiate athletics in the first institution. Meanwhile, the second participating institution, also considered a small school, had nearly 40% of the campus represented by student-athletes. Both institutions offered 20 or more sports programs. Further, an investment towards athletics has been proven, with budget expenditures on athletics alone representing around 4 million dollars at both institutions. Based on this number, it was evident that athletics was an integral component of each institution based on how many student-athletes enrolled and how much was spent on athletic initiatives. It is expected that the current study will extend the athletic initiative at each institution

by providing insight into how athletic participation enhances student-athletes and impacts graduates entering the workforce. Data relating to institution A and institution B were estimated to protect the identity of the colleges.

Research Orientation

Due to the nature of the current study and the examination of phenomena, perceptions, preferences, and suggestions, the study displayed components of various interpretative frameworks. However, the primary elements that provided a framework for the research orientation comprised the constructivist and transformative paradigms, as explained in the literature (Creswell & Poth, 2018). First, the research orientation aligned with the social constructivism paradigm due to the desire to better understand the participants' experiences and the role of those experiences in shaping their realities. Following Creswell and Poth's (2018) recommendations, using social constructivism framework allowed the participants to create meaning from their experiences while allowing the researcher to categorize and identify categories within the meanings. Additionally, the aim of this research was to learn from the participants regarding how the perceptions of their experiences and interactions shaped their understanding. Relating to the transformative paradigm, the goal of the current study was to seek outcomes to make improvements for student-athletes, which Creswell and Poth (2018) described as the primary purpose of transformative research. Combining these two frameworks, using this constructivist-transformative paradigm allowed for deep understanding of student-athlete experiences relating to followership from the participants' perspective. Further, using the research orientation helped identify opportunities for growth, initiatives for change, and ways to enhance the student-athlete experience while developing followership among college students.

Research Design and Rationale

In the current study, the researcher used a qualitative multi-site phenomenological case study design to gain a better understanding of the development of followership skills within the context of athletic participation at two different institutions. The purpose of phenomenological research is to

understand the experiences of individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018) while also searching out commonalities within the experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). Therefore, the phenomenological design was an appropriate approach to capture participants' experiences and highlight similar experiences. Due to the perceptions of multiple student-athletes and coaches being examined and the goal of finding common practices that promote the development of followership, a phenomenological research design was necessary to ensure that lived experiences were accounted for and participant perspectives were included.

Case study research often analyzes one group (Saldana & Omasta, 2018) by exploring real-life situations within boundaries (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moreover, Bloomberg and Volpe (2018) outlined that case study research is useful for thoroughly analyzing the perspectives of many participants within the boundaries of the case. Saldana and Omasta (2018) indicated that case studies are bounded by location but are comparable to cases existing in other locations or outside the defined bounds. Recognizing how collegiate student-athlete development exists at every college or university offering athletic opportunities, the case study approach was applicable. To ensure a thorough analysis of holistic perceptions, boundaries were set within the case and the opportunity for improvements was present. It was also necessary that a case study design guided the current study. Using a multi-site case study allowed for the analysis of various student-athletes and coaches from two different institutions. Ultimately, a multi-site phenomenological case study research design for the current study to better understand influencing factors, habits, and commonalities in the participants' experiences relating to the development of followership within teams at the sample sites being examined.

Although case study design can be conducted using qualitative and quantitative methods, the nature of the research questions indicated the value of utilizing qualitative research methods. Specifically, Bloomberg and Volpe (2018) described qualitative analysis as a means of gaining understanding through the insights, thoughts, and perceptions described by others' experiences. Researchers use quantitative analysis to highlight commonalities and outliers and statistics to provide insight into the various relationships within a study (Terrell, 2016).

Therefore, to understand the differences between qualitative and quantitative, a qualitative method was necessary to ensure that participants' experiences and perceptions were understood and accounted for, and to learn from the shared experiences. To effectively conduct the multi-site phenomenological case study, the study involved two qualitative methods of document review and individual interviews with student-athletes and coaches.

Bracketing

Conducting phenomenological research requires the facilitator to create opportunities for participants to share their lived experiences. Additionally, phenomenological research is meant to describe lived experiences of participants who share the experience of a similar phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As the facilitator of the interviews and a primary tool in the research process, I had to ensure that my ideas and opinions were not integrated into the research. Specifically, as a student-athlete, team member of a collegiate-level sport, and a collegiate-level head coach, I practiced bracketing to ensure that the participant's thoughts and ideas could emerge. Bracketing is defined as "setting aside assumptions" to ensure that personal opinions are not influencing participants (Saldana & Omasta, 2018, p.128). To actively practice bracketing, semi-structured interview protocols guided the discussions. Specifically, researchers use open-ended questions in semi-structured interviews to allow participants to speak freely (Creswell & Poth, 2018); therefore, I used the structure of specific questions to stay on track and not probe out of curiosity or self-interest.

Sampling: Case and Participation Selection

Before selecting a case and participants, it was necessary to note that the population for the current study consists of student-athletes and coaches at the collegiate level. Due to the vast number of collegiate athletic participants, which the National Collegiate Athletic Association cited as being more than 480,000 (NCAA, n.d.c), the scope of the study was limited to a region within New York State. Limiting the scope of the study to a geographical region aided in selecting the cases for the study. The region selected offers collegiate athletic opportunities

at over 10 different institutions. A priority in case selection was that cases were common in academic and athletic offerings and campus populations. Therefore, the participating institutions were selected using purposeful selection (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). Three local institutions representing private education in the New York State region, with similar athletic sports offerings and rated as small schools received an email request to participate in the current study (see Appendix C). Of the three invited, two institutions agreed to participate.

Purposive sampling is best used when specific criteria of each participant are desired (Saldana & Omasta, 2018). Therefore, the researcher used purposeful sampling for this study to ensure that data were information-rich, ensure a mix of participants sharing the same phenomena, and gain in-depth understanding. Bloomberg and Volpe (2018) identified similar advantages for purposeful sampling. Eligibility for prospective student-athlete participants was as follows:

- Currently enrolled in an undergraduate or graduate program at the selected case-study sites;
- An active participant of a collegiate-level varsity team for a minimum of 1 year.

In addition, eligible head coaches were head coaches of a collegiate-level varsity team within the institution with preference given to head coaches with increased years of experience. The researcher sent an email to all student-athletes and coaches at both institutions to recruit participants for the study (see Appendix D) with a link to an online questionnaire to field participation requirements (see Appendix E). In addition to the request to participate, the email (see Appendix D) contained background information on the study's purpose, informed consent, and a statement that participation was anonymous and confidential (see Appendix A). Interview participants signed copies of informed consent via e-mail before their scheduled Zoom interview.

Research Setting

To interview 10-14 participants effectively and efficiently, both Zoom and Otter.ai were used. Using Zoom video conferencing allowed for ease of scheduling

as participants could meet from a convenient location of their choosing. Additionally, Zoom has video recording capability, which aided in accurate transcription. Otter.ai aided in transcribing the language throughout the interviews. Ultimately, these tools aided in facilitating productive interviews with participants. The researcher scheduled all interviews individually with each participant using Google scheduling. Interviews were anticipated to be 35 minutes to 40 minutes in length. The use of Zoom and otter.ai allowed for copies of the interview to be sent to the participant if they requested to review.

Data Collection Strategies

The aim of the current study was to highlight the phenomenon of athleticism and followership development. Moreover, the qualitative design was appropriate to capture the experiences of participants on how athletic participation impacted their perceptions of followership. The primary sources of data for this study included semi-structured interviews and document reviews. Specifically, semi-structured interviews facilitated a conversation between participants and the researcher to potentially identify contributing factors of followership development through the experiences of athletics. Documents often integrate the ideas and interests of the author (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019), and the review of athletic handbooks may provide insight into the development outcomes for student-athletes and coaches. To ensure best qualitative practices relating to phenomenological research, the methods of data collection have been outlined in Table 2.

Table 2*Data Collection Strategies*

Method of Data Collection	Description of Activities
Semi-structured interviews	35-minute individual Zoom interviews with six to eight student-athletes, and four to six head coaches, all utilizing the same set of interview questions, asked in the same order (see Appendix B).
Document review	Institutional student-athlete handbook document(s) will be obtained from the athletic department website for analysis.
Interview follow-up	Follow-up interviews will be conducted should there be a need for clarification or if additional questions emerge after data analysis.

Initial and follow-up interviews were recorded for ease of transcription and review. Otter.ai aided in transcribing the interviews in a word-for-word format. All documents reviewed were saved electronically on a password-protected computer. Each interview began with an introduction of the researcher, a description of the purpose of the study, and an opportunity for a brief discussion between the researcher and participant. The reason for this session is to gain the trust of interview participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Bloomberg and Volpe (2018) suggested that interviews remain open-ended to ensure questions allow participants to share the perspective of their individual experiences. Additionally, Creswell and Poth (2018) indicated the importance of interview questions aligning with the research questions. Therefore, to ensure the goals of the study are being achieved through the interview questions, Table 3, Table 4, Table 5, and Table 6 outline each interview question, the purpose for asking the question, and the research question it is best aligned with. The researcher piloted the interview questions with coaches and student-athletes in an effort to revise them for clarity.

When creating the interview protocol, alignment with research questions was critical. To better understand the purpose of the questions and how the participants would engage with the research questions, the researcher created an outline. Table 3 provides a list of the interview questions and the purpose of each question that contributed to gaining a better understanding of the RQ1.

Table 3

Interview Questions Supporting RQ1: How do the experiences of athletic participation contribute to the participants' followership skills?

Interview Question	Purpose of the Question
Would you describe yourself as a follower?	Peters and Haslam (2018) indicated that a leader's or follower's self-identification could contribute to a better understanding of followership characteristics.
Why do you perceive yourself as a follower or not; What were you thinking as you answered that question?	To probe further into the participants' perception of followership, this question was asked to understand how they may or may not fulfill a followership role.
What components of your athletic experiences shaped your response to question one?	Participants could relate their athletic experiences to their perception of their followership.
To close out our conversation, I'd like to ask you again ... are you a follower? Why or why not?	Asking this question again allowed the participant to reflect on the conversation and how their perspective of followership may have changed or stayed the same.

To ensure that information relating to the second research question was gathered, Table 4 shows the four questions that aligned best with RQ2. To continue with interview question alignment, Table 5 shows four research questions that yielded feedback relating to RQ3. Lastly, Table 6 includes a summary of the

participants' responses to the question that contributed to enhancing theoretical framework within the current study.

Table 4

Interview Questions Supporting RQ2: How do student-athletes and coaches perceive the role of athletic participation in the development of followership skills?

Interview Question	Purpose of the Question
How did your athletic career contribute to developing followership skills?	Participants may identify specific factors throughout their athletic career that aided their ability to follow, which may be thematic amongst multiple participants.
Can you provide an example of a time during your athletic career when you had an opportunity to develop followership skills?	Creating the opportunity for a participant to share an experience ensured that their lived experiences were the basis of the discussion of how athletics contributed towards followership development.
In what ways, if at all, do followership skills contribute to team success?	This question allowed participants to identify characteristics of followership that influence outcomes.
Can you provide an example of a time during your athletic career when you believe followership skills contributed to team success?	Allowing the participant to speak of their lived experiences allowed for the flow of their perceptions of how sports involvement and followership skills are related.

Table 5

Interview Questions Supporting RQ3: How do student-athletes and coaches perceive the relationship between followership skills and leadership skills?

Interview Question	Purpose of the Question
What is the difference between followership skills and leadership skills?	This question allowed the participants to share their perceptions of the differences or similarities between followership and leadership characteristics.
What components of leadership do you believe contribute to the development of followership behaviors?	This question challenged the participants to explore the relationship between leadership and followership.
Can you provide an example where yourself or a team member utilized followership behaviors to influence and / or lead others?	This question allowed the participant to share lived experiences to better explain how they perceived healthy followership could create leadership.
Can you describe a time when a coach or team leader practiced or modeled followership behaviors to influence and / or lead others?	Additional opportunities for the participant to share lived experiences allowed for describing followership behaviors that contribute to leadership.

Table 6

Theoretical Framework Question

Interview Question	Purpose of the Question
What do you believe are the behaviors, skills, and attitudes of a strong follower?	This question allows the participants to describe their ideas of the construct of followership.

Data Analysis Strategies

To ensure that phenomenological and case study practices are considered during the data analysis process, the researcher prioritized the essence of the experiences while exploring cross-case commonalities, as suggested by Bloomberg and Volpe (2018). The process of data analysis consisted of multiple steps, including reviewing, interpreting, organizing, and understanding collected data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). The process of data collection for multiple interviews and document reviews can be lengthy, and data must be appropriately organized (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, Bloomberg and Volpe (2018) argued that various forms of data analysis strategies for qualitative research exist, but all share the commonality of underlying themes and patterns (p. 234).

To organize data effectively, multiple tools were used. Otter.ai was the primary transcription method, running concurrently with the interviews to gather a written transcription. After the transcription was complete, a review of the recording alongside the transcripts for accuracy followed. Participants also had the opportunity to review the completed transcription to confirm accuracy. The only changes made to the transcriptions were removals to protect the anonymity of participants.

The primary tool used to organize thoroughly interview transcripts and documents was Microsoft Excel. To ensure the participants' privacy, transcriptions were titled to protect each participant's identity throughout the data analysis and review process. Assigning documents with anonymous names protected the identities of the institutions from which they were developed. All files were saved on a password-protected computer. A codebook was developed and maintained in Microsoft Excel, outlining the codes and categories within the emergent themes of all data collected.

Data analysis involved a thorough analysis of interview transcriptions through line-by-line readings and code assignments. Code assignment involved priority for frequent concepts, how extensive participants' thoughts are, passion, and overall perception shared by participants, consistent with Bloomberg and Volpe's (2015) recommendations. The researcher conducted a document review to

better understand how the author(s) gained the reader's attention. Further, the analysis of documents leads to the identification of the author(s) intentions and possible value systems, as Saldana (2021) suggested. To thoroughly analyze athletic department and team documents, memos relating to the content of the documents were made within the Excel software. Document analysis entailed reading the documents through first, seeking information about student-athlete development, leadership, followership, responsibility, or other common themes that ultimately seek to enhance team members. Further, the researcher revisited the documents after developing the codes from interview data to capture any information within the documents that might relate to developed codes. The codes were categorized alongside the interview data to contribute to emerging common themes.

Thematic analysis, the process of recognizing and reporting themes within collected data (Creswell & Poth, 2018), was the primary method of data analysis for the current study. A thematic analysis led to the identification of themes most relevant to the phenomenon being studied within each case. Saldana (2021) outlined best practices for thematic analysis of qualitative data relating to phenomenological and case study research. The first step requires data to be reviewed and themes relating to the research questions to be identified (Saldana, 2021). Identifying themes includes reviewing the data and creating memos for common sayings, words, or phrases. Further, extracting sentences that directly address the research question was the first step of theme extraction in this study. After identifying the various themes, patterns and similarities were noted for how they relate and differ.

To capture emergent themes within the data, the researcher used the data analysis spiral described by Creswell & Poth (2018). The data analysis spiral includes collecting data, organizing data, memoing emergent themes, classifying codes within themes, assessing the findings, representing the data accurately, and discussing the finding (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A thorough data analysis included inductive, or in-vivo, coding as the primary coding method to ensure that codes emerged from the data rather than predetermined, as Saldana (2021) indicated. In

vivo coding ensures that participants' experiences of what is significant are being captured within the data (Charmaz, 2015; Saldana, 2021). In conducting additional reviews of transcriptions and documents, the researcher used a more deductive form of coding in final passes to better align the ideas and perceptions of various participants, consistent with Saldana's (2021) guidance. Upon completion of coding, codes were organized into categories, and ultimately developed emergent or common themes within the codebook.

Assumptions

Creswell and Poth (2018) described assumptions as individuals' perception of what is true and known, which can often guide or dictate the research approach. Moreover, assumptions can often dictate research explanations, indicating whether there is support within the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Throughout the current study, the researcher made assumptions about the followership construct. The first assumption was that participants understood the term follower and the followers' role within athletics. Further, it was assumed that participants perceived athletic experiences to be impactful on their personal development journeys. Lastly, it was assumed that biases, personal experiences, and personal beliefs were withheld from the study, as Yin (2018) stated.

Limitations and Delimitations

The purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions of student-athletes and coaches on the development of followership through athletic experiences. However, the study methods could create potential weaknesses in the data due to internal and external influences. Limitations are best described as external conditions that create restrictions within the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018, p. 13). Limitations of the current study included the assumption that participants were truthful and honest during interviews. Additionally, a limitation of the study was the use of college students who may not have reflected enough on the impact of collegiate athletics on their personal development.

Bloomberg and Volpe (2018) described controllable limitations as delimitations and parameters intentionally imposed on the study. Delimitations of

the study included site location, as the case study sites were selected based on their ease of access and commonality with one another. Another delimitation was the small number of participants compared to the number of college athletes and head coaches in the state, country, and world. However, the delimitations of the study were imposed to begin identifying themes and contributing factors to the followership development of student-athletes.

Ethical Assurances

Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that qualitative research must uphold the highest ethical standards. Following Creswell and Poth's (2018) guidelines for ethical issues, there were ethical considerations before conducting the study, at the start of the study, during the collection process, during analysis, when reporting data, and when the study was published. Additionally, the researcher implemented ethical considerations of all participating institutions to ensure institutional research guidelines were upheld.

The researcher obtained approval from Southeastern University approval through the Institutional Review Board and all participating institutions (Appendix F), as well as from athletic departments to solicit participation among student-athletes and coaches. Study participants were treated in accordance with all institutional research guidelines and were informed that their participation was optional, what the purpose of the study was, what the research design was, and what their rights were as study participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Informed consent was provided to all study participants, explaining any benefits and risks of participating in the study (Appendix A). Measures to protect the participants' confidentiality included assigning each individual a pseudonym and reviewing the data for any identifiable traces back toward participants or institutions and disguised to ensure anonymity. All documentation was secured on a password-protected computer. As an ethical consideration, the researcher was employed by one of the participating institutions and maintained a relationship with the athletic department of the other participating institution. Excluding student-athletes who were members of the researcher's current team from participation helped eliminate

conflict of interest. The research followed institutional research best practices to avoid any potential biases.

Summary

In summary, the purpose of the current research study was to explore the perception of followership development through sports involvement. The phenomenon was researched by exploring lived experiences of student-athletes and head coaches and their perception of followership development because of collegiate sports involvement. This chapter provided a detailed summary of the qualitative research design, including an explanation for using a phenomenological case study approach, data collection processes, and thematic analysis. The following chapters will provide additional information on selected study participants and findings from the study. The final chapter will outline conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 4 – Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how student-athletes and coaches perceived followership skills are developed during athletic participation and involvement. The NCAA has significant programming and funding for the leadership development of student-athletes and coaches. However, the programming does not highlight the role of followers within teams and how being good followers could enhance leadership abilities. With over half a million collegiate athletes in the United States (U.S. Sports Scholarships, n.d.), exploring the relationship between sport participation and the development of followership skills was critical to further developing individuals for societal contributions.

Data Collection

This study was phenomenological case study research to explore how student-athletes and coaches perceived athletic participation contributed to followership development. The study was guided by four research questions and 13 interview questions. The Southeastern University Institutional Research Board and the Institutional Research Boards of participating institutions granted research approval. Upon approval, recruitment for the study began by emailing a participant interest form to athletic directors and head coaches at the two participating institutions. Upon request, athletic directors forwarded the information to head coaches and student-athletes and head coaches to consider participating while also forwarding the information to their rosters. Upon the initial request for participation, three coaches and four student-athletes from institution A responded with interest in participating. Three coaches and three student-athletes from institution B responded with interest in participating. The researcher emailed each participant individually to coordinate times and dates for Zoom video calls and provided all participants with informed consent via email before participating in an interview.

Part of the recruitment process included a questionnaire to identify the historical experience and demographic information of participating student-athletes and coaches. Table 7 contains details of the results of sport participation for

student-athletes and coaches. The participant's identity was protected by assigning random numbers to each participant. Additionally, information relating to the sport that the student-athlete plays or that the head coach oversees has been removed to ensure confidentiality. Although 45 minutes were reserved for each interview, the interviews ranged from 20 to 58 minutes, with an average interview time of 28 minutes.

Table 7

Participant Demographics

Participant	Role on Team	Gender	Years with current Collegiate Team	Total Years in Sports (within current role)	Formal Leader Role on Team
P1	Student-Athlete	Female	2	5+	None
P2	Student-Athlete	Female	3	5+	None
P3	Student-Athlete	Male	2	5+	None
P4	Student-Athlete	Female	3	5+	Captain
P5	Coach	Male	6	10+	Head Coach
P6	Coach	Male	10+	10+	Head Coach
P7	Coach	Male	10+	10+	Head Coach
P8	Student-Athlete	Female	3	5+	None
P9	Student-Athlete	Female	2	5+	None
P10	Coach	Male	6	10+	Head Coach

Data Analysis

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research data analysis includes examining individual data components while synthesizing common themes to fully understand the meaning of the participant's thoughts. The current study's data analysis process included document review and interviews. These two sources of data are described below.

Interviews

The primary method of data collection for the current study was interviews. The researcher conducted 10 interviews with student-athletes and coaches via Zoom and recorded their responses using both audio and video. Audio recordings were uploaded to Otter.ai for the purpose of transcription. After each interview, the researcher reviewed and cleaned each transcript to correct errors before exporting them to Microsoft Word. All transcripts were saved on researcher's password-protected computer.

The coding process involved reading each transcript and document five times. The purpose of the first review was to clean and correct any transcription errors. In the second review, the process for coding began with *in vivo* coding as described by (Charmaz (2015) and Saldana (2021) by reading the transcripts line by line and identifying elements of the participant's language as potential codes and categories. In the third review, the researcher used process coding, which is focused on transcription elements related to observable action (Saldana, 2021). During the fourth review of the transcripts, special attention was placed on values coding, which is necessary to understand any potential moral or value-focused elements (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). In the fifth and final review, the researcher sought out any indication of emotion from the participants (Saldana, 2021). Using Microsoft Excel for coding allowed for easy categorization into codes. After coding was complete, the various codes were moved into relational categories or subthemes, as described by Strauss and Corbin (2015). Similar categories were aligned together to identify emergent themes.

Document Review

In addition to interviews, another source of data was reviewing athletic department documents. The two documents reviewed were student-athlete handbooks for each institution. The documents were titled Handbook 1 (H1) and Handbook 2 (H2). The documents contained information about student-athlete expectations, goals the institution had set for student-athletes, and opportunities to develop and grow during their collegiate career. The documents review followed the interview data analysis. In this step, the researcher read each document through three times. On the first read, elements of the handbook were aligned with the outlined codes from the interview data analysis. No new codes emerged during the first read. The purpose of the second read was to examine the intent for development and assigned codes to any portions identifying an opportunity, intent, or wish for development. The third read was a final read of the documents to ensure the accuracy of the code assignment. The next step involved moving the various codes along with the codes from the interview data into relational categories followed by aligning similar categories together to identify emergent themes.

Themes

The purpose of the current research project was to examine the experiences of student-athletes and coaches and their participation in sports. Throughout the data analysis process, there were 772 data segments. Within the 772 data segments, 18 categories emerged. A review of the 18 categories yielded six themes. Six major themes emerged after analyzing the experiences of six student-athletes and four collegiate head coaches. Of the six themes, two aligned with RQ1, two with RQ2, and two with RQ3. The fourth question was theoretical and will be discussed further in Chapters 4 and 5. Table 8 provides a summary of identified themes and categories in relation to the four research questions.

Table 8*Emergent Themes of Research Analysis*

Themes	Categories	Research Question
Formation of followership	Personal goals, developing followers, followers' feelings	RQ1
Followership skills formed through sport	Follower characteristics, contributions of sport involvement, follower actions within sport	RQ1
Followership skills enhance life skills	Life skills and traits, reasons to follow	RQ2
Effective followers enable team success	Team success, teamwork, culture	RQ2
Leadership and followership skills are transferable	Leader and follower relationship, communication, overlap of skills	RQ3
Leaders should promote followership	Leaders set the boundaries, leaders' actions, leader characteristics, creating space for followership	RQ3

Theme 1: Formation of Followership

The theme of the formation of followership was prevalent throughout the data analysis process. Overall, Theme 1 comprised 81 data segments within three categories: personal goals (13), developing followers (36), and followers' feelings (35). The formation of the followership theme was connected to RQ1: "How do athletic participation experiences contribute to the participants' followership skills?" Three interview questions (Appendix B) were asked to gain an understanding of the participants' perception of followership. Table 9 shows a summary of Theme 1, its categories, and occurrences within the data.

Table 9*Codebook for the Theme 1: The Formation of Followership Development*

Theme	Categories	Occ.
Formation of followership	Personal goals	13
	Developing followers	36
	Followers' feelings	35

Personal Goals. The category “personal goals” included the following codes: following someone to reach a goal (2) and personal achievement (11). Athletic performance is often driven by internal motivation or personal goals. Though many sports require significant teamwork, participants described the importance of identifying and being aware of personal goals. Participant 3 stated, “ultimately, that person that you’re following could lead you to where you want to go, to achieving your personal goals [*personal achievement*].” He continued,

I think it was kind of my personal goals and personal things I wanted to achieve that kind of made me motivated. You know, everybody doesn’t have the same goals even if they’re on the same team [*personal goals*]. But my personal goals motivated me to work hard for the team [*personal goals*].

However, it was clear that working towards personal goal achievement within the context of a team contributed to developing as a good follower. Participant 3 explained,

Like, because that's one of those things that, like, not everybody achieves their goals [*personal goals*]. And that's something I realized too, like, you know, this past season, like, you know, we were making changes and things like that. And I, like I, unfortunately, didn't make all-conference team like I didn't get recognized or anything like that, but it's kind of one of those things that it's okay that I didn't do it because of the success of the team was way better if that makes sense. Like other players got recognized, and I'm happy for others. Like me personally, and the goals I set out at the

beginning of the season, I didn't achieve them [*personal goals*], but that was okay because I was able to contribute to the team still.

Participant 6 shared an example from a team he was in:

So we're coming out of out of practice. We're all you know, tired. We've done our two hour practice and it's been raining the whole time and we've all showered we've got our clothes on we come out and there's there's still three four guys doing drills on the on the turf, right and and it starts to to hit you. Oh, gosh. That's why they're better than the guy that's standing next to me that's ready to get in his car and go home. And I think we see that in our athletes today in college. There are some who who see what it takes [*personal achievement*] ... to do the extra stuff that it takes to get better [*personal achievement*].

Participant 1 contributed that being a good follower adds to personal success when she stated, “It’s going to make me a better follower and improve my abilities [*personal success*] which could improve the whole team.” Interestingly, personal achievement and goals were littered throughout both institutions' student-athlete handbooks. Specifically, H2 read, “Our goal is to show you how to be successful as both a student and an athlete while also becoming a better player” [*personal achievement*].

Developing Followers. The category “developing followers” included the following codes: time and experience develop followers (7), sports develop followers (5), self-improvement develops followers (3), and follower development (21). Follower development was a common theme throughout many of the qualitative discussions. The participants cited various experiences that contributed to their ability to follow. Further, interview questions prompted participants to share stories of opportunities they had to enhance and develop skills relating to followership. Participant 10 described followership skills as being developed at an early age:

I think part of it was probably also my personality in terms of how I was raised; you know, I came from ... my dad taught me to respect people just because they're older, and that's what you do. And so, you know, as a youth

player or high school kid ... I would follow and follow the leadership group
[time and experience]

Participant 10's sentiments about his upbringing were echoed by Participant 4, who stated, "I don't know if it was just from playing sports my whole life or the way I was raised, just that, like, I can speak for myself, but I have to follow others too"
[time and experience; sport involvement].

Although family makeup and upbringing are often the primary sources of an individual's development, others described how their experiences as young athletes taught them to follow others. Specifically, Participant 8 described how as a young athlete, she followed until she gained the knowledge to influence:

When I was a freshman, I was following the seniors, and just, if they were to say something while we're doing something, then I'd sort of just like follow them in a way. But now I am a junior, and there was no like senior in the group, so I noticed then the underclassmen that were below me were sort of like following what I was doing *[time and experience]*.

Participant 9 shared similar experiences, indicating, "I think just through time and experience, that will help you just like anything else to be better at following" *[time and experience]*. Additionally, Participant 9 indicated that you develop a variety of skills as a follower: "and so you develop all these skills being in a follower position ... skills like being able to communicate and being able to listen. I think the skills ... are built from being a good follower" *[follower development]*.

Beyond developing follower skills through experience, multiple participants cited the importance of sports in their ability to be good followers. Specifically, Participant 1 said, "I feel like sports; if I didn't have sports, I wouldn't have had such an easy time being a follower now" *[sport involvement]*. Participant 5 noted,

I think my experiences as a follower came probably as a player. In a team sport, you understand that, in many cases, you have to put aside your own personal desires and aspirations for the good of the team, right? So that helped me understand how to be a good follower *[sport involvement]*.

His experiences were echoed by Participant 6, who declared,

That realization that maybe somebody knows something that I don't know, and maybe I should pay attention to what they know. That realization, taking that in, evaluating. Yeah, you know that's a huge life lesson. I learned that pretty early on in sports which led to me knowing how to be a good follower [*sport involvement*].

Overall, it was apparent that participants recognized the importance of developing followers' skills. Throughout interview discussion, participants noted their followership development or ways to contribute to others' development of follower skills. Participant 1 shared her perception, saying,

I try to be a good follower. I actually just want to get through what we have to get through and do what we have to do to become better athletes [*self-improvement*]. I feel like it's important to actually listen and do what they (coaches) say because they know what is going to be better for me and team [*self-improvement*].

Participant 5 described how he views growth and development:

So I better be a better coach next year than I was this year [*self-improvement*]. Right. Otherwise, we're going backwards, just like I have, you know, I'm a firm believer that everyone has to improve their skills on the field and in their ability to lead and follow, including the coaching staff [*self-improvement*].

Participant 7 described the ratio of leaders and followers within athletics, saying,

So many things are for leadership development. Well, there's like two leaders on every team and 30 followers. And that's everywhere you go, right? How many leaders do we have right here? On who makes the final decision on everything, one person. We're all followers, so why are we not doing more effective training for them [*follower development*]? If we did, teams and groups would be more successful.

Though the discussion on how exactly followership development can be facilitated was limited, Participant 9 described one way to develop skills, saying,

As an incoming freshman, you kind of just have to keep your head down and just follow what our upperclassmen and like our role models are doing.

But then, just taking what I've learned from last year and applying it to this year was also a huge success in my ability to follow [*follower development*].

Recognizing the critical role of a follower, Participant 10 said, "The idea of followership has helped me to have an understanding that you can't do it all, that you need to lean on your strengths while working on your areas for improvement" [*developing followers*]. He went on to share how vital good followership is on his team, saying,

And so I think coaching has given me that perspective also. But I would say my last five, five or six years have made me more passionate about the topic and the importance of good followership, and to your point right, I think we always presumed growing up that people just like follow people. Yeah, now I live in a world where it's like, no, people don't just follow. They almost need to be taught [*follower development*].

Therefore, participants perceived followers as integral components of their teams' success while recognizing that a follower's skills must be developed through sport, experiences, or other potential mechanisms.

Follower's Feelings. The category "follower's feelings" included the following codes: Feeling unsure/scared (2), feeling important/considered/contributing (13), feeling powerless (2), feeling regret (4), feeling passion (1), feeling nervous (1), feeling caring (3), feeling happy (3), feeling frustrated (3), feeling anxious (1), feeling annoyed (2). Integral to how participants perceived the importance of developing follower skills, the importance of recognizing how followers feel emerged from the analysis. Specifically, participants cited a variety of emotions they felt as a follower and observed in other followers. Participant 8 recalled her experience as a new team member and a follower and her feelings:

During my like freshman year of like college, I was definitely like a follower and that aspect because, like, being on a freshman team with like, 60 people and everything that had like been established like relationships with the coach and everything [*feeling unsure*]. That was more of just like,

what they say like, Yeah, I'll be doing that because I was like, scared to sort of like, put in my opinion, just like following people because, like, I was scared to make like a commotion like my freshman year [*feeling scared*].

She also described her perception of her role on her previous team, saying, "Before college, I was like more of a follower and stuff like that because I was nervous to upset people" [*feeling nervous*]. Others noted various experiences of feeling frustrated and annoyed when poor followership was displayed. Participant 5 expressed his feelings as a player, stating,

When I recall back to my playing days, we were just kind of told what to do. You know, it was just the whats and the hows. Never the why. It wasn't ever explained, you know, so it's just, you better do this or else you know, and I remember feeling kind of powerless, right? [*feeling powerless*]. You just, you know, and sometimes if you didn't agree with it didn't matter if you didn't agree with it, you know, you just had to like it or lump it, right [*feeling frustration*].

Recognizing his frustration as a follower who felt powerless, he shared, "What I tried to do now is, you know, get into more of the whys so they buy into it".

Conversely, when participants discussed developing followers, many shared the importance of ensuring followers feel essential, considered, and like contributors. Participant 2 noted, "The role of a follower needs to be taken more seriously by everyone" [*feel considered*]. His feeling that followership was important was echoed by Participant 5, who said,

And the follower side again, I think that if you feel like you're part of the process or part of contributing, you feel. I hate to use the word empowered, but if you feel so empowered, then I think you can buy into it like this is OUR program. It's not your program that I'm just part of, right? It's my program too. I think that's key [*feeling considered; contributing; feeling empowered*].

Participant 6 spoke of the impact of not considering the follower's feelings, saying, There are leaders out there that are not concerned about development. They're concerned about win and loss. And, and so the players, the athletes,

become tools to that end. And if you talk to athletes that know that they were tools to that end, they'll tell you they didn't have a great experience [*Feeling regret*].

He went on to share some ideas to ensure followers feel important, saying,

And the buy-in, right, because when you're making sure someone's feeling okay, you're checking in to ensure that they're still bought in, and if they're not, why not [*Feeling considered*]?

In discussing his experience as an athlete, participant 7 shared that he did not care about his success within the sport itself. Instead, “as an athlete, I was always wanting to be significant rather than win” [*Feeling important*], indicating that how an individual perceives their feelings and experiences matters significantly.

Theme 2: Followership Skills are formed through Sport

Throughout the data analysis, the theme of followership skills was prevalent. Overall, Theme 2 had 250 data segments within three categories: characteristics of followers in sport (105), contributions from sports involvement (16), and follower actions within sport (129). The followership skills formed through the sports theme was connected to RQ2: “How do student-athletes and coaches perceive the role of athletic participation in developing followership skills?” I asked two interview questions (Appendix B) to gain an understanding of the perception of the role athletic participation has on developing follower skills. Table 10 summarizes Theme 2, its categories, and occurrences within the data.

Table 10*Codebook for Theme 2: Followership Skills Formed Through Sport*

Theme	Categories	Occ.
Followership skills	Characteristics of followers in sport	105
Formed through sport	Contributions from sports involvement	16
	Follower actions within sport	129

Characteristics of Followers in Sport. The category “characteristics of followers in sport” included the following codes: Using judgment (3), straightforward thinking (2), positivity (4), independent (8), having good character such as respectable, disciplined, mature, etc. (15), selfless (7), patient (2), motivating (1), empowered (4), courageous (1), accept constructive criticism (7), absorb information (3), serve others (2), have less knowledge (1), and are good listeners (45). Participants felt strongly that their time as athletes and leading teams contributed to their understanding of the skills of a follower. Further, all participants believed athletic participation contributed to the development of followership within themselves. When asked about what skills were developed through athletic participation, Participant 3 noted, “When you’re following somebody, you have to be patient” [*patience*]. He shared an example about not agreeing with a team decision and mentioned, “I mean, maybe it’s something that you have no control over, but at the end of the day, you still have to exercise patience” [*patience*].

In addition to patience, many participants cited the importance of good character in followers. Specifically, Participant 2 described followers as, “They’ve got to be respectable people [*respectable*]. I think they can be like disciplined [*disciplined*]. That’s something I learned how to be as an athlete.” Participant 3 shared an example of what characteristics a follower should have when speaking about himself: “and when I could just take a day off, I like personally like I couldn’t do that because like, realistically, I came all this way to play my sport. I had to stay committed” [*committed*]. Participant 3 also shared an example of his observance of good followership in a teammate:

And even with another teammate who was unfortunately ineligible to play this season. He also came into practices; he actually got to wash our game jerseys and do all that stuff. And he was consistent with that [*consistent*].

There was never an issue with that. So I think those are kind of examples of follower characteristics on the team [*characteristics of followers*].

In describing the characteristics of good followers he has had on his team, Participant 5 said,

I think, first of all, you gotta be mature [*mature*]. I think someone that is has a pretty good self-awareness [*self-aware*]. I think that's, I think, someone who is intelligent [*intelligent*]. You know, I think someone that is willing to have conversations and understand maybe the whys behind some of the expectations.

Similarly, Participant 10 described some of the character traits he saw in his athletes:

The ability to agree to disagree [*use judgment*]. Understand, again, that, for example, you know, your captains or your coaching staff, they have to make decisions, and they value your opinion. They want to hear your opinion, but when they don't act on it, it doesn't mean it was a waste of time. It just means that we agree to disagree that there are a lot of different ways to look at it. I do think part of followership is again picking, and this is a different, same thing but different terms like picking and choosing your battles [*use judgment*]. Like knowing that okay, this, this is something that I feel passionately about for our culture, for our team, for our team standards. I gotta say something to the to the captains about this. I think that that takes courage if you feel that strongly about a certain incident that's happened or a way that we do things [*courage*].

Among other common characteristics mentioned was using judgment to make decisions, as described by Participant 4, "I wouldn't, you know, listen to everything someone said, you know, if they told me to do something that I didn't think was right, I won't do it" [*listening*]. Additionally, many suggested that followers are selfless. Participant 3 described this further, saying,

One other thing that I forgot to mention when you're following, I think you got to be really selfless [*selfless*]. Like, because that's one of those things that, like, not everybody achieves their goals. And that's something I realized as an athlete.

Participant 10 also described the idea of being selfless and sacrificing for the good of the team when he shared an experience this past season:

But this past year, we went on the road, and we lost in overtime. It was pretty frustrating, and the sets, the team played well like we all shot we doubled the opponent shots, but we lost in overtime because our highest-scoring player, who struggles with details, just missed just the lack of details on the final goal. Long story short shot came in from the point she was near but not into her check. She tipped it. They scored, they won, whatever. I don't know if this is if these two things connect, but the conversation that night and the next morning before our final game with the same team was the importance of you have to give yourself up to the team [*selfless; serve others*] have to be willing to just to do the things that are uncomfortable for you or to you and just give yourself up to the team's mission vision goals standards game plan, in order for us to get the most out of ourselves. And I do feel like that next day we did that. You know, we back-checked harder. We were tighter with our checks in the defensive zone. We were consistently vocal and positive on the bench. And we came back and responded well in won three to nothing. And I think that that idea of giving yourself up to the team is something that we carried with us the rest of the year [*selfless*].

In addition to the characteristics identified, followers were identified as being positive, accepting criticism, and applying change. Participant 2 described how team member positivity encouraged her: "I know that people there will be players that are definitely more positive and they'll say comments, and I'll be like, okay, I needed that" [*positive*]. Participant 4 described seeing teammates "adjust to what they're (coaches) telling them to be better." In contrast, Participant 9 noted, "I think followership is like you're trying to take away like those pieces and apply to

yourself and just like getting better for the team” [*applying change*]. Participant 4 described some traits that poor followers exhibit:

You see it a lot with people who can, just like you can see the difference between coachable players and uncoachable players, and the uncoachable is just not being able to adjust to what people are telling you [*characteristics of bad followers*].

Participants often spoke of the character traits of followers. The most prevalent trait identified as necessary for good followers by many participants and acquired within athletics was the ability to be a good listener. With 45 occurrences, listening was perceived to be a follower's most important character trait. Participant 1 shared that listening is a necessary skill:

Being able to effectively listen [*listening*], I feel like that’s a big part of following. Because if you’re not properly listening and you’re not taking in any of the information that your leader is trying to tell you. That’s just a key skill. Just being able to properly listen and taking in all the information that you’re given is important [*listening*].

She went on to describe her own experience on a new team:

And because I've never had a coach specifically for that event before, all of the leadership kind of went out the window because I didn't know what I was talking about anymore. So I had to listen to him [*listening*], and then I had to listen to my team captains [*listening*], that obviously knew a lot more than I knew.

When asked what an essential trait of followership is, Participant 2 said, “I guess like being good listeners” [*listening*]. Participant 4 noted the same trait, “Um, being able to listen [*listening*] and adjust to what they’re telling you because if you don’t listen to them, obviously that would be just completely ineffective for the team” [*listening*]. She went on to say,

Just being in the role of a follower, just, you know, you become a better teammate, become a better player and learn how to listen [*listening*] to what they're telling you to do and adjust to it and put it in to place and into action to get better.

Participant 8 described followers as “being able to listen” [*listening*]. And spoke of her perception of her team gaining a new coach, “there were a lot of people that were like followers like just sort of just listening to what he was saying to us” [*listening*]. Regarding her sport specifically, Participant 9 shared that good followers “can take coaching cues” [*listening*]. She went on to speak about herself on the team and shared, “We have captains ... and like, I always listen to what they’re saying so that I can be successful and help the team in the future [*listening*].” Participant 10 shared similar sentiments when stating, “Followers need to be good listeners” [*listening*]. Overall, it was evident that participants perceived listening as a necessary skill trait of good followers and shared many examples of listening within their sport(s).

Contributions from Sport Involvement. The category “contributions from sport involvement” included the following codes: play your part (11), different sports develop followers differently (3), and college sports challenge followers more (2). After reviewing the data, it was evident that participants perceived their abilities to fulfill the follower role were developed through sports involvement. Participant 2 described the importance of fulfilling the role of follower, saying,

I think that there’s always going to be leaders and followers on teams or anywhere, really, but if everybody’s trying to lead, it’s going to be so independent. Not everyone can be a leader, you really have to work together, and it’s a team sport you cannot win without leaders and followers [*play your part*].

Participant 5 described how team sports are integral to developing follower skills by forcing team members to fulfill a role:

And I think it's dependent on the sport. Because individual sports aren't maybe as naturally set up that way, right? But as a team sport, you understand that in many cases, you have to put aside your own personal desires ... You have to fulfill the role that the team needs you for [*play your part*].

He described the importance of role fulfillment by saying, “So if you didn’t fulfill that job, people were depending on you to do your role. That’s a big deal” [*play your part*].

Ultimately, it was consistently echoed throughout the conversations that all roles serve a purpose on a team. More specifically, participants perceived followers to be equally as important as team leaders, top-scoring athletes, and coaches. Participant 1 stated, “It’s just you have to recognize contributions from all parts. Sometimes you’re in leadership, or sometimes you’re just part of the whole team. Every position is necessary to succeed” [*play your part*]. Participant 3 shared an example of a teammate who had to assume a new role for the team but still contributed, stating,

I think one one person that sticks out to me was ... a senior ... he had some issues with, like, reoccurring concussions. But I think kind of just his attitude every day come in and practice being the energy on the bench, like he was so very much into the team, even though he knew there was a very, very, very, very slim chance he's getting on the field ... And, like, obviously, it was tough, but I think it was just kind of kind of his character. So that was something we really appreciate it. I think it really did help that help our team to have a good season [*play your part*].

Participant 7 described athletes he coached and how their willingness to do their job within their role created cohesion:

Yeah, the girls were able to, kind of, even though they were better than the leaders, just do their part, play their role, do their workout. They trained the way they were supposed to by working hard. It paid off because the team got better, and they learned how to be good followers [*play your part*].

Frequently, student-athletes are faced with having to adjust their role within the team. Factors such as new team members, injury, or lack of performance contribute to transitioning roles. Regardless, as a follower, Participant 9 noted that she was able to contribute in any role she had the opportunity to fulfill. She described her experience as follows:

And I went through like a lot of injuries during that time period. I had surgery and had to miss like my entire junior year of high school because of that, and so just like being able to sit back, but still being able to, like, help my teammates from like an outside perspective. And like not being on the field with them. I was always able to like, like, put in my thoughts and like have open lines of communication if they needed help or anything like that. I still like got to do my part and contribute to, like, help the team, even if it was from like a background standpoint [*play your part*].

Recognizing the importance every team member plays and how they learn to fulfill various follower roles as parts of a team, Participant 10 noted, “I think seeing peoples strength’s as a trait of good followership helps them fulfill various roles” [*play your part*].

Follower Actions within Sport. The category “follower actions within sport” included the following codes: Providing support (13), recognizing their role (10), leading be examples (22), initiating (12), going above and beyond (5), following instructions (11), not blindly following (3), influencing (30), engaging in healthy conflict (10), casting vision (6), being aware of team needs (2), and having good habits (5). Participants shared their perceptions of how followers within athletics contribute by describing various actions taken by effective followers. Participant 1 coined the term followership mentality, saying, “In terms of having that followership sort of mentality and working within that to effectively influence others ... if you have that, you can accomplish a lot with the whole team” [*influencing*]. She described how she would initiate activities as a follower: “I was trying to help the team captain, or I was leading stretches when they weren’t there” [*follower actions*]. Participant 7 echoed this view when suggesting that “as a follower, I’m not just responding, but I’m initiating. That is part of it” [*initiating*]. Participant 2 also described how observing other players' initiative showed her good followership when she said, “I think like watching players who like kind of go above and beyond what would be expected of a player is encouraging” [*going above and beyond*].

Participant 6 pressed on the importance of followers supporting others throughout his interview. He shared his perception of self, stating,

I can describe myself as a rule follower as a person who sees things that need to be done and does them in the support of team and the support of my own team and the support of the team for the department [*initiating; supporting*].

He further explained,

And I think the best followers anticipate needs that haven't been spoken and provide support. And I think I'm pretty good at that. I think I'm pretty good at that. I'm doing it now. Here. I will do it in the new position [*being aware of team needs*].

Upon reflecting on his followership abilities, Participant 10 described how he adjusted his behavior to be a better follower:

And honestly, like, I've I've tapped the brakes on that because as a follower, I'm like, if I want to progress here professionally, I can't be the guy nobody wants to work with because he just doesn't shut up. Like there's a balance of, you know, I still feel the same way, but after a while, people don't want to work with you. So it taught me. I was taught in those moments with self-reflection that, all right like I have to trust through the least dangerous presumption that he is trying. Like I gotta get off his back and just be a supportive coach within his department [*supporting*].

Participant 1 noted, "If people are not good followers or have good followership skills, I feel like teams would not run effectively" and went on to share that a necessary skill is being aware of other's needs, "so being an athlete and being able to see how everybody else around you is doing and thinking, oh, well if we work on this, we would be way better" [*being aware of team needs*]. Participant 2 cited that followers should engage in healthy conflict, "I feel like obviously, depending on the situation, like there's, there's definitely times where you don't agree with something" [*engaging in healthy conflict*]. Participant 10 supported this by stating a followership skill is "the ability to agree to disagree" [*engaging in healthy conflict*]. He shared an example:

Understand, again, that, for example, you know, your captains or your coaching staff, they have to make decisions, and they value your opinion. They want to hear your opinion, but when they don't act on it, it doesn't mean it was a waste of time. It just means that we agree to disagree that there are a lot of different ways to look at it...Because I do think part of followership is, again, picking, like picking and choosing your battles. Like knowing that okay, this, this is something that I feel passionately about for our culture, for our team, for our team standards. I gotta say something to the to the captains about this. I think that that takes courage if you feel that strongly about a certain incident that's happened or a way that we do things. Because the ability to like, and I guess I just said it a little bit which is agree to disagree but also to to create the the ability to create conflict or healthy conflict is a really hard thing for young people to engage in, but so necessary for followership [*engaging in healthy conflict*].

Further, both student-athlete handbooks cited the importance of learning to engage in healthy conflict. In reviewing H2, the institution indicated, "It is our goal to help student-athletes resolve conflicts to the satisfaction of all parties through an informal process. This process should guide student-athletes in navigating healthy conflict resolution."

Another action that participants indicated followers should practice is following directions and instructions. Participant 1 described this action as "effectively doing what they are asked" [*following directions*]. Participant 3 spoke about how following directions looks within his team, "So, like, let's just say that I don't agree with the formation our coach plays us in, I still have to perform in that, and everybody's still got to perform in that to achieve the goals" [*recognizing their role*]. Participant 4 shared her experience returning from injury, "I had to fill a new role as a teammate, you know, and following directions in a different way than as if I was still on the field" [*recognizing their role*]. She went on to speak about her teammates, "everybody has to do what's being asked of them to do their job. I think that's what followership is all about" [*following instructions*]. Participant 8 repeated this concept, stating,

Good followers just take in the instructions from coaches and make changes. And when leaders are telling you to do something, not really like questioning what they're like telling you and more just like, whatever they say sort of goes when it comes to the success of the team. And it's like a mentality that needs to be adopted [*following instructions*].

She even mentioned her perception of her followership abilities and noted, "I'm not necessarily a follower, but I do what I am told" [*following instructions*], indicating that she recognizes how important following leadership instruction is for the team.

Another action that participants perceived necessary for good followers was the ability to lead by example. Participant 3 cited a team member that he believes portrays good followership and said,

Like he's able to basically just, like, show you how it's done. So you know what to do. Like, he was like, kind of the standard, like sometimes it's like kind of a standard of like how we're supposed to do things [*leading by example*].

He went on to describe,

So I feel like good followers are kind of like, kind of show people like if if the other followers are going in the wrong direction, just like okay, this is how we are supposed to do things [*leading by example*].

He shared one last example he shared of how informal leaders often lead by example when he stated,

Well, so some team members are kind of just like lead by examples on and off the field. Like, you really don't have to say much like you kind of like already know. You already know what to do from watching them [*leading by example*].

Participant 4 shared, "Creating influence, I think that comes from like a leading by example, at least that's how I am like I would be if somebody's doing something right then I'd be willing to follow them" [*influencing*]. Participant 6 shared how a team member created influence within the team by being a good example:

She was one that helped to shut down the dissonance that was left over from from that and, and she did it very respectfully, and you know, there was a

conversation go and see what just take it a different direction. Stop talking about it. You stop talking about teammates. We don't talk about our teammates. We, you know, yeah, we talk to our teammates. We don't talk about our teammates. And, and I think that she was very instrumental in that and, and we would have been a lesser team had she not been showing ladies how to do that [*influencing*].

Participant 7 noted, "I think the ability to lead from the middle is kind of important as well to create influence" [*influencing*]. Participant 9 described the importance of leading by example:

And you're like setting good examples for your teammates and, like, the people below you. Like as a starter, I always made sure that like I'm on time to everything. And like, I'm just like, I have a good voice on the field, and I know what I'm doing and like where I'm supposed to be. And like, as a team member, like you're trying to set a good example [*leading by example*].

H1 also contained information about the importance of student-athletes being role models on campus, portraying a good character, and leading by example in all areas. Participant 6 shared an example of how a follower's actions can influence change in describing a team he played on:

So we're coming out of out of practice. We're all, you know, tired. We've done our two-hour practice, and it's been raining the whole time, and we've all showered, we've got our clothes on, we come out, and there's there's still three-four guys doing drills on the on the turf, right and and it starts to to hit you. Oh, gosh. That's why they're better than the guy that's standing next to me that's ready to get in his car and go home. And I think we see that in our athletes today in college. There are some who who see what it takes and , and are willing to put in let's call it what it is a sacrifice. They're gonna sacrifice their own desires. Yeah, to get to dinner on time or whatever. To to do the extra stuff that it takes to get better. That creates influence on team members to do better [*influencing*].

When discussing the follower's impact on teams, participants in the current study perceived followers to be able to influence positively and negatively.

Participant 2 shared examples of how the poor attitudes of followers created a negative influence on her team:

Poor attitude has the ability to like carryover, even if it's just like not in a game but in a practice. If it's raining or if it's cold like I don't really want to go to practice today. Some teammates bring that attitude to the field, and I'm thinking in my head like you're a client, like you're paid to play for two hours, and like that, that part really frustrates me. And I think that that can carry over, like, I'm feeling tired. And then another players like, yea, you don't need to go as hard, and they're tired, and they don't feel like being there. And I think that really carries over and prevents the team from making big strides in practice [*influencing*].

Participant 4 spoke of a teammate who often creates a positive influence:

Yeah, I think, um, this year, I don't think the leadership is that strong on our team, and one of the other sophomores who she's a very good player and... even just on the field like she's the one that if she thinks we should switch up their defense like she just goes and asks, and you know, I think she's definitely a lead by example [*follower influence*], kind of player and I think almost like I'm sure some of the other girls feel this way too, but at least for myself like I look at her more as a leader than I do even the leadership on our team. Um, she's just like a tough player hustles all over the field. And I mean, you just kind of have to respect that she's one of our best players. And she's consistent, and that, I think, is the most important thing. So it's not like hot and cold. So every game she's, you know, giving it her all in it least, you know, coming up with some points, so even during practice, like during every single drill, she's, you know, going 100%. So, you know, that's, that's seen by everyone and influences us to do better [*influencing*].

On this note, participant 7 suggested, "Followers can use their experience to influence others" [*influencing*]. He went on to say,

Positive, those really positive people often are kind of interesting [*influencing*]. The ones that voice it the voice of the people that are bought in and servants. The people that show up and do the work [*influencing*], you

know, even if they're not as talented. And they contribute... You know, some of those people can become the heart and soul without being a leader or the best.

Additionally, Participant 8 spoke of a relationship within her team that was a positive influence on her:

Even though she wasn't necessarily like a captain. When I was a freshman, she was a sophomore. I still like sort of I saw her like as like a leader in that position, because I felt like very comfortable. Like, knowing that if like, I would like to follow her and everything that would be like the right like decisions and everything [*influencing*].

Participant 9 described how as a follower herself, she created influence among team members:

There was like a time last week when we had like team lifts which our strength and conditioning coaches like didn't show up to any of them, which is really annoying...And so I kind of just like no one really knew what to do. No one was warming up, and it was like just time to get started with the lift. So I just decided to, like, all of us, like we can break into like different groups with like different members of class [*influencing*].

She also shared an example of how negative followership behavior can create poor influence, stating,

There have been times in like lifts and stuff like that, where like, I've seen our upperclassmen, just like completely skip like a warmup or like a set or something which like, for me, personally, I like, it, like, pisses me off a little bit just because like, our spring season is where we earn our starting spots and they're showing the rest of the team bad habits, and it's contagious [*influencing*].

Participant 10 further described how followers could create positive and negative influences:

Being around other teammates who, who didn't, who were the and I don't think in a positive way [*influencing*], we're like the disruptors are constantly complaining about the coach, you know, we're out when we're out on a

Saturday night or in practice or, you know, constantly complaining about the leaders or you know, they don't do this, or this or I think that gives that gave me insight into how it can impact a culture and how the impact of that culture can impact your team's ability to maximize potential right [influencing].

Participant 6 shared another example of the impact of negative influences on the team:

A couple of years back, we had a transfer come into the team, and she just had a different idea of what needed to happen than the Coach and the coaching staff. And she actually set out to divide the team. She went after that and made great friends with the freshmen and divided the team. And it absolutely had an impact on the team. I mean, gosh, was there was there any trip that we went on that we did not have to have a team meeting? I don't think so. It was exhausting. It was fatiguing and, and the players both the freshmen and the ones who were not involved in the in the tug of war. They were just tired of it. And that has held over for two seasons. I've still got one person who's who's there, through those two seasons. And she says, You know, I'm not coming to any of these team meetings. Because they're useless. And, and that's, that's a big impact. And it and it lasts for years. It doesn't leave when that person leaves, although it helps with [influencing].

Theme 3: Followership Skills Enhance Life Skills

Theme 3, followership skills enhance life skills, emerged throughout the data analysis process. Theme 3 had 119 data segments within two categories: life skills and traits (50) and reasons to follow (69). The theme of followership skills enhance life skills was connected to RQ2: "How do student-athletes and coaches perceive the role of athletic participation in developing followership skills?" Two interview questions (Appendix B) were asked to gain an understanding of followership skills. Although the questions related to the participant's time as an athlete, the theme of life skills emerged due to the recurrences of statements that these skills are necessary for life, too, not just in followership. Table 11 contains a summary of Theme 3, categories, and occurrences within the data.

Table 11*Codebook for Theme 3: Followership Skills Enhance Life Skills*

Theme	Categories	Occ.
Followership Skills Enhance	Life Skills and Traits	50
Life Skills	Reasons to Follow	69

Bligh et al. (2018) suggested that developing followership skills creates a lasting impact on individuals and contributes to enhancing their lives. Participants in the current study shared this sentiment, as they discussed various traits they perceived as not only elements of followership but also necessary life skills. Additionally, participants explored and shared various reasons they follow individuals, and reasons to follow were categorized into this theme because as individuals develop, following is a necessary component of life. Further, participants described navigating reasons why you should or should not follow individuals as a necessary life skill.

Life Skills and Traits. The category “life skills and traits” included the following codes: Trust (5), humility (5), life skills (13), and respect (27). An overarching theme that participants shared was the relationship between perceived followership skills and necessary life skills. Participant 1 noted, “That’s just a key life skill in general” [*life skill*] when sharing characteristics of followership. Participant 4 said, “I think it’s just the way, like, it’s kind of needed. Just in life. I mean you have to listen to people (follow)” [*life skill*]. She shared that she recognizes how she needs followership skills for life, “But I mean, I also know that I have to live and listen to people and that you can’t always just do whatever you want all the time” [*life skill*]. When discussing how team members practice followership by showing respect, Participant 5 stated, “There’s a difference between, you know, really respecting something or someone and showing respect. We all have to show respect regardless. And that’s a skill set, or life skill” [*respect; life skill*]. Similarly, Participant 6 spoke of followership traits as life skills when he said,

So, yeah, that realization that maybe somebody knows something that I don't know, and maybe I should pay attention to what they know. Take that in, evaluate it. Yeah, you know, and that that's a huge life lesson [*life skill*]. Learned that pretty early on in sports, but you, you learn it again definitely by being a good follower.

He also expressed that followership skills are necessary for life, stating, “Where don’t you develop followership skills? They’re necessary for a productive life” [*life skills*]. Both institutional handbooks supported the development of life skills through athletics, and H2 included a statement that “student-athlete life skill development through intercollegiate competition” is a primary purpose of the department.

Participants shared examples of specific skills they perceived necessary for good followership and productive life skills. Participant 5 noted that a great skill for life and followership is humility by sharing the following example:

And the cool thing is when you hear him being interviewed like ... and they talk about that, and you know, they want to hear about him and him and him. He is always deflecting back, you know, he gets it, and the young players on the team, see that right. Oh, my gosh, there's this all-American just broke the school record. You know, he could be saying, "Look how great I am". And he's kind of given everyone else credit [*humility*]. That awesome. That's somebody that you would want to follow. That is someone that will be great in any organization. That humble attitude [*humility*].

Participant 10 described the importance of trust not just in teams but also for followers and in life, “I think that they (leaders and followers) need to have trust” [*trust*]. He went on to discuss what good followers need to be productive in society, stating,

A genuine, authentic chameleon, someone who can shift personalities to connect with different types of followers and their personality because, in the end, right, we're trying to create that level of trust [*trust*] and healthy loyalty [*trust*].

Of all the skills described by participants, most agreed that respect is necessary for followership and in life. Participant 1 declared, “being able to like respect the leader that’s actually in charge. That’s necessary to be a good follower and for life in general” [*respect*]. She talked about opportunities for growth with her team and shared, “developing that maybe a little bit more, the respect, respecting authority. It definitely helps and could make people better” [*respect*]. Participant 3 shared a personal example about how his followership is based on respect:

But I guess I guess you could say like it depends like the situation if I am a follower. Like, if it’s my mom, like, I gotta listen to what she says to me and do what I’m told. I gotta be a follower and respect [*respect*].

Participant 4 declared, “It’s not a free for all,” indicating that individuals have to respect others around them and cannot just do whatever they desire. She went on to state, “I think ... the biggest thing is the respect from the team. Leaders have to respect followers. Followers have to respect leaders” [*respect*]. Participant 6 shared about team discussions, stating, “We talk an awful lot about, you know, we don’t necessarily have to like things, but we have to respect it. That’s just the way life is in sports and out of sports” [*respect*]. He said again, “But I tell my guys, you have to show respect. That’s just a skill set of life. Right? To show respect to somebody that you really disagree with or don’t like” [*respect*]. Additionally, Participant 8 spoke of people on her team who have created influence, “I think they are like, more like vocal ... and sort of just like having a relationship with like everyone on the team and for them to like respect everyone” [*respect*]. Participant 10 shared the progression that showing respect can have within a team:

So I think I would come back to just this this healthy respect for each other [*respect*], which creates a level of synergy which creates a lack of disruption or or I'm trying to get the right word distraction would be the other word I would use. When you're absent of that distraction, and truly, you're all moving in as close to the same direction as possible, then you get the most out of yourself, which I think leads to tangible successes because we're all locked in and focused on our team goals or our ultimate goal.

Reasons to Follow. The category “reasons to follow” included the following codes: follow those who are doing good (5), follow someone you’re comfortable with (4), follow someone who has a plan (4), follow someone who communicates well (27) and identifying as a follower (29). Categorized under life skills, participants shared various characteristics they look for before following someone. Furthermore, some shared their perception of why they are a follower and how it has helped them in sports and life. Some characteristics shared were the ability to have a plan. Participant 3 shared,

Obviously, it depends on the type of follower you have, but like a leader has to have structure, for me personally, to be able to follow them. Just in any aspect of life. Like there's no plan, and like, what am I following you for? Because if you don't have a plan, then I might as well lead with no plan anyways. If you do have a plan and we have a structure, and this is where we're trying to go, I think it's very much it's very, it's easier to follow somebody like that [*able to plan*].

Participant 8 shared what she looks for in a follower, “someone who is a very like comfortable person that I could like talk to and like know that what she is saying was like factual and right” [*comfortable*]. Participant 2 noted that when she is deciding who to follow, “I think like when other people try to do something, or I’m thinking the wrong way, I kind of follow that and try to like walk in their path and do the same thing” [*doing good*]. Similarly, Participant 4 said,

I think creating influence that comes from like a lead-by-example mindset. At least that’s how I am like I would be if somebody’s doing something right, then I’ll follow them. But if somebody's saying something and then they’re not doing it, why would I listen to you? [*doing good*].

When looking for the individual to follow and the skills that they possess, participants indicated that effective communication is necessary. Participant 2 noted, “I think that it’s all about communication” when asked what skills a follower must have. Participant 4 answered, “Just being able to communicate and being able to listen, it goes both ways for followers” [*communicate*] when asked the same question. Participant 5 shared his perspective on the importance of communication,

You have to be able to understand what it's like to sit in that chair (of a follower) and be able to communicate. And be able to convey the type of message that would be well received if you were the follower, to the point where I would want to follow whatever leader I'm following
[communicate].

He said, "You know, I think someone that is willing to have hard conversations"
[communicate] when discussing traits of people he'd be willing to follow.

Participant 9 agreed, stating,

So I think just like having like an open line of communication
[communicate], which is like something we haven't had, like, you need to be able to talk to your upperclassmen and like they need to be able to talk to you and it has to be like a positive environment *[communicate]*.

In thinking about skills followers will carry on beyond their athletic career, Participant 10 described someone who "can voice your opinion, you can, you know, go to the leader and have your voice heard, but then outside of that meeting, right, like, we're all on the same page" *[communicate]*. He also mentioned the importance of sharing ideas:

I think if we're, if we're like defining the skills the way that you define them, previously, which is not blindly following, which is open communication, you know, people being heard, ideas being shared, good dialogue, back and forth *[communicate]*.

Therefore, it is evident that participants perceive communication as a necessary skill possessed by someone they choose to follow. Additionally, participants shared various skills and traits that they believed followers must have that also integrate into life skills.

In addition to sharing reasons for choosing to follow, many participants described why they identify as a follower. Participant 1 shared how she moved from a leader on her high school team to a follower on her college team when she stated,

So definitely, through sports, I have learned that I'm not always going to be the top person, and I've come to peace with that – even in academics. So

just being able to, sort of still thrive in the space of not being in a leadership role is something that I've learned from seventh grade when I first started like more organized sports [*follower identity*].

Participant 3 was reluctant to identify as a follower but did say,

Yeah, but I think if I'm following somebody, like, there has to be like, like a, like an action plan, like is this person actually going to help me get to where I gotta get to? So I guess, like in the areas I occupy, I would say I follow a lot. You know, being on a team. Being team captain, I gotta follow the coach and what he says. Being a son, I gotta follow what my mom says. Being a student, I got to listen to the professor's. I got to follow them and the class plans. I guess those areas that I occupy, I am a follower [*follower identity*].

Similarly, Participant 4 expressed why she was reluctant to identify as a follower:

And I think how you mentioned, there's like the negative connotation with the word. And I think when I first answered the question, I definitely had some of that where I didn't want to be like, yeah, I'm a follower. But I think now, going over it more, I think I definitely am [*follower identity*].

Participant 8 shared that her experience dictated her ability to lead or follow:

I think, like certain instances, I would like follow what people are doing [*follower identity*] like before college, I was like, more of a follower and stuff like that. And like during my like freshman year of like college, I was definitely like a follower [*follower identity*] and that aspect because, like, being on a freshman team with like, 60 people and everything that had like established like relationships with the coach and everything [*follower identity*].

Interestingly, coaches were quicker to identify as a follower and had less reluctance in their tone when describing their followership abilities. Participant 7 noted,

All of my jobs I've had I don't really have a boss, but I am never really the leader either. Never the top dog always the teacher you know, you're in your classroom you're in charge but there's somebody in charge you're coaching

you know, you're in charge of your team, but I don't really necessarily would consider myself a leader. Capable, yes. Experienced, yes. Leader, no. [follower identity]

Participant 6 similarly described himself, saying, "I can describe myself as a rule follower as a person who sees things that need to be done and does them" [follower identity]. Meanwhile, he also indicated that he has leadership abilities, "So I would ... I would say yes, I am a follower. But I am also a leader at the same time" [follower identity]. Likewise, Participant 5 said, "I would say yes, I'm a follower, but I would also say I'm a leader. I think I am both" [follower identity]. Participant 10 also indicated he identified as a follower, "I think I'm a follower when when expected to be a follower when the situation calls for it" [follower identity]. He went on to share his perception of why he identifies as a follower:

And you know, again, I don't think I got into this much earlier, but I think part of that is just age and experience of, you know, I think when you're younger you, you want to lead everything you want to change the world, you feel like you have the answer. And over time, I've realized that you know, for the most part...most of the ideas we come up with, most of the things that we believe are game changers, have probably already been thought of...And so I think that over time...understanding that there's reasons for things which just made me a better follower when times call for me to follow, but I do think it comes with time and experience [follower identity].

Throughout the discussions, participants shared numerous ideas for why they follow people while describing their identity as a follower. Evidently, the time they spent as athletes and coaches contributed to their ability to follow effectively.

Theme 4: Effective Followers Enable Team Success

The fourth theme, effective followers enable team success, emerged throughout the data analysis process. Theme 4 had 138 data segments within three categories: team success (79), team culture (22), and teamwork (378). Effective followers enable team success was connected to RQ2: "How do student-athletes and coaches perceive the role of athletic participation in developing followership

skills?” For this theme, two interview questions (Appendix B) were asked to gain an understanding of followership skills. Table 12 shows a summary of Theme 4, categories, and occurrences within the data.

Table 12

Codebook for Theme 4: Effective followers enable team success

Theme	Categories	Occ.
Effective followers enable team success	Team Success	79
	Team Culture	22
	Teamwork	38

When examining team success, followers have often been overlooked. Ralon et al. (2021) suggested that followers are necessary to ensure team success. Participants in the current study indicated similar ideas, suggesting that good followership enhances team culture, followership is necessary for teamwork, and when healthy followership is being practiced, teams succeed.

Team Success. The category “team success” included the following codes: team unity (6), individual roles contribute (4), attitudes impact success (4), commitment impacts success (2), team success is better than personal success (11), team success (12), follower buy-in impacts team success (12), and hindrances to team success (28). Conversations with participants indicated a correlation between followership abilities and team success. Participant 1 noted,

If I just effectively listen and effectively do what is being asked, it’s just going to make me a better follower and improve my abilities which can improve the whole team [*team success*].

When asked if followership contributes to team success, Participants 3, 4, and 5 all indicated yes. Participant 4 shared, “I think it completely contributes to the team’s success because whether it’s in terms of the team culture or whatever it is, the team has to buy in or else it won’t be successful” [*buy-in*]. Participant 10 agreed, stating,

And if you're, if you're absent of that unhealthy disruption, doesn't that mean that your focus is more towards development team goals, ultimate goals. And so the practices are better, your gameplay is better, your

executions better [*team success*]? And I think that's our goal in team sports is you're trying to maximize every individual's potential in order to like all rise up, then it's like if we're all doing that, then our team's potential is able to be maximized [*team success*]. If you're all moving in as close to the same direction as possible, then you get the most out of yourself, which I think leads to tangible successes because we're all locked in and focused on our team goals or our ultimate goal [*team success*].

Concerning team success, Participant 3 noted that individual success should not be the priority, saying, "Sometimes you have to put what you want I guess aside."

Participant 5 spoke of team success within his team and how they work to mitigate the individual. He shared,

Yeah, I mean, you know, the one thing that we kind of de-emphasize as the individual, so I'm not a big like MVP, or MIT, you know, we don't we don't do that. Even when guys are awarded, you know, all-conference, you know, awards or you know, athlete of the week. Yeah, we downplay it, because we constantly talk about this is never ever about one person, right? Never. So, you know, even though someone is recognized, as you know, something that they did out on the field, that's great. But they couldn't have done that without each other. And we say this in the group [*team success*].

Interestingly, Participant 3 shared how he believes team success is more rewarding than individual success:

I, unfortunately, didn't make all-conference team like I didn't get recognized or anything like that, but it's kind of one of those things that it's okay that I didn't do it because of the success of the team was way better [*team success*].

He went on to discuss how every individual needs to succeed in their role for the team to move forward: "so if we're playing bad in the formation, none of us are going to be all-conference none of us are going to win none of us are going to do this do this do this" [*team success*]. Participant 9 spoke of the importance of people fulfilling their roles and working hard and shared her perception of what happens when people do not fill their roles:

We can all have like a great team dynamic where like everyone is doing their part and doing what they're supposed to be doing [*individual roles contribute*]. And so like starting to see like, a few people just like skipping out on warmups or like skipping around or skipping a set and like, that's just like a negative impact of that [*hinderances to team success*].

Participant 4 elaborated on this idea:

Whatever it is, the team has to buy in or else it won't be successful. You have to like everyone has to be on the same page. Everybody has to do what's asked of them to do their role [*buy-in*].

When talking about team success, Participant 3 shared how impactful it was for him to see other team members contributing to the team's success. He described,

There's one player and like, for the most of like, some games, like he didn't really play and like if he were to play like you're getting to kind of the later stages of the game, but his attitude towards practice and things like that kind of just that kind of motivation was kind of one of those good things to see. Like, you know what I mean, that somebody that really knows they're not going to play as consistently ... like they still contribute to our atmosphere as well which contributed to our success this year [*commitment; individual roles contribute*].

Participant 2 shared that success comes from more than just good gameplay, saying, "If you're all positive normally and want to play like it's a really nice day out then practice tends to be better and the team gets better" [*team success*].

Participant 6 shared an example of a successful team when he said,

You look at you look at the teams that are successful. Our, our, our March Madness. Those teams that are successful are all pulling in the same direction. They're, they're in the boat with their oars, and they're all going in the right direction. They're not they're not pulling against each other and going, they have to pull that way or, or they're not going to succeed ..., this unity, this this momentum moving forward. And if they don't buy in it, it's devastating for everybody [*team success*].

Participant 4 recognized how necessary follower buy-in can be on the overall success of a team and described her current team:

I think, this year we maybe have bought in more and shown more of these followership things and I think that can hopefully lead to more of our success this year [*buy-in*].

Participant 4's team went on to the conference championship and concluded their season with a conference title. Participant 5 spoke of his approach to follower buy-in, saying,

And what I tried to do now is, you know, get into more of the whys so they buy into it. So they, they, in a sense, have skin in the game ... And we'll have conversations and maybe it's, you know, guide them and direct them a little bit. But at the end of the day, I think if they feel ownership it's almost like empowering them on some level. So there's a little bit more of a buy in. I find it's it's a little healthier environment, far more productive and the team performs better [*buy-in*].

Participant 6 shared about a team he coached that saw success due to intangible things he believed were good followership:

I think followership at its height doesn't always come along. No matter how hard we work at it. And when you combine that with having the right horses in the barn, which is my phrase of, you know, recruiting the right people. So I coached high school ... I had I had a team that on paper, they shouldn't have won. They shouldn't have won. But they set up a five-year undefeated. ... It was all of those extra things [*buy-in*].

Therefore, it is evident that participants perceived that when followers are bought in and feel ownership, their ability to succeed is increased.

It should be noted that participants described what they perceived to be hindrances to team success. Participant 1 noted that without good followership, "the team would not run effectively near at all" [*hindrance to team success*]. She also said, "Team members need to like actually participate instead of just ignoring leadership and stuff like that. I don't think a team would be a really good team if it didn't have that component" [*hindrance to team success*].

Participant 3 described that he felt he was a hindrance to team success when he said, “And me personally, I wasn’t like in the best like shape, I would say. So I think I understood, and looking at other players, I saw where I had to go...I had to stay committed to be better for the team” [*team success*]. He went on to say, “We can’t be selfish, selfish, selfish if you’re following because there’s not going to it’s just not going to work. The team won’t improve” [*team success*]. Participant 10 described how negativity could impact team success when he said,

And so, you know, I think every time you've got someone within the followership who is negatively disrupting because disruptors aren't always bad, but I think it just kind of chips away at what you're trying to do. And it doesn't mean you can't win with that, but I think it becomes harder to maximize potential with it [*hindrance to success*].

Team Culture. The category “team culture” included the following codes: Healthy environment (2), good culture improves performance (2), nonplaying members contribute to culture (2), poor leadership impacts culture (2), and team culture (13). During interviews, participants regularly spoke of team culture and the habits and practices that enhance team culture. More relevant to the current study were mentions of how a healthy team culture founded on good followership often positively impacted team success. Participant 5 stated, “A little healthier environment (is) far more productive, and the team performs better” [*healthy environment*] when talking about the culture within the team. Participant 4 described how her coach “puts a big emphasis on team culture,” [*team culture*] which ultimately led to “a stronger bond” among teammates. She noted, “It led to team success because everyone was following their assignment.”

Participant 1 cited team culture as contributing to team success when she said, “So there is not just enhanced team culture. But with having enhanced team culture, you're going to have better performance almost every time just because you feel a stronger tied to your team” [*team culture*]. When speaking about successful teams, Participant 5 stated,

I mean, I think that with any kind of team, you know, you certainly have to have talent to get to a certain point, you know, but invariably, you talk to all

these championship teams, and they always talk about this idea of family or the team chemistry, right. So that's that intangible that you can't really put your finger on it [*team culture*].

Participant 10 shared, “I think that gives that gave me insight into how it can impact a culture [*team culture*] and how the impact of that culture can impact your team's ability to maximize potential.” Participant 1 recognized the role of the follower, saying, “Being an effective like follower, then that would definitely contribute to athletic performance and team success.”

Teamwork. The category “teamwork” included the following codes: engagement (2), sharing ideas (4), cohesion (5), teamwork (8), sacrificing for the team (8), and filling any role to benefit the team (11). When discussing team success, participants shared that teams only succeed when they work together. Participant 1 indicated that followership is necessary for teamwork, saying, “So just the overall, part of just like working within the framework is just something that you’d see all the time ... you have to be able to accomplish together for the whole unit” [*teamwork*]. Participant 2 described how in her sport, “you really have to like work together ... it’s a team sport you can’t win without it (teamwork)” [*teamwork*]. She shared an example of how followers on her team encourage teamwork:

So as older athletes, we set goals, like let’s make a goal and try to get as many like passes or whatever, without turning the ball over. And then if they’re like all working towards it, then what we lead, we can all then follow [*teamwork*].

Participant 3 noted, “If everybody has the same goals then ... then we’re obviously gonna go the same direction” [*teamwork*], which supports the idea that followers should understand the goals and work in a unified direction. Participant 3 also described how adapting and filling any role the team needed contributes to good teamwork. Specifically, he said,

Yeah, I could probably say this year, I mean, this year, like I didn't play out of position, but I didn't play like like last season, I was in a certain position like the whole year, and then we actually had a transfer come in so then he

played in that position and then first couple games I wasn't playing or whatever and then um I that I started playing a different position and that's just what I had to do. But that was kind of the adjustment I had to make. It was just something that's for me realize, like, if I want to play, this is just where I got to play [*teamwork*].

He went on to say,

And it wasn't like I did bad or nothing, but I just felt like I just felt like that was something I just had to like sacrifice and really just hone in on it [*sacrificing for the team*]...like there's no point of like sulking, of course, you want to play where you want to play and where you trained. But this is one of those those switches you got to make for the team if, like if you want to achieve success [*sacrificing for the team*].

In discussing what good teamwork looks like, Participant 6 mentioned, “being able to see the vision being able to understand the vision and see their part in the vision taking the role that ... the coach has given them” [*engaged; sharing ideas*]. He went on to share his experience of being a good follower and a team worker:

So if I wanted to play, I had to be a good follower, and I had to be a good athlete, and I had to do, you know and and part of that followership was, you know, hitting the gym, hitting the you know, I I hate lifting weights, I hate it with a passion I do not find it in any way, shape, or form beneficial to me outside of the athletic performance. And I don't enjoy it. I don't. I don't like it. But you know what, I I was doing it to get better for the team. [*teamwork*].

Participant 10 spoke of teamwork, noting, “There’s a sense of there’s a sense of synergy there or cohesion” [*cohesion*]. Participant 4 mentioned the importance of having a bond, noting that it often leads to team success. Additionally, both handbooks cited the importance of teamwork among student-athletes. H2 contained the statement, “In my opinion, the teams that realize the most success are the teams that work together and have student-leaders” [*teamwork*]. The student-athlete handbook also included multiple citations of the importance of working together.

Theme 5: Leadership and Followership Skills are Transferable

The fifth theme, leadership and followership skills are transferable, emerged throughout the data analysis process. Theme 5 had 112 data segments within three categories: leader and follower relationship (71), overlap of skills (34), and leader and follower communication (7). The leadership and followership skills theme was connected to RQ3: “How do student-athletes and coaches perceive the relationship between followership and leadership skills?” Four interview questions (Appendix B) were asked to understand the participant's perception of leader and follower skills. Table 13 shows a summary of Theme 5, its categories, and occurrences within the data.

Table 13

Codebook for Theme 5: Leader and Follower Skills are Transferable

Theme	Categories	Occ.
Leader and Follower Skills are Transferable	Leader and follower relationship	71
	Skills overlap	34
	Leader and follower communication	7

Participants in the current study perceived leadership and followership skills as similar and even transferable. Participant 4 stated, “I mean, to be a good leader, you have to be a good follower at some point,” indicating how the two constructs have become integrated.

Leader and Follower Relationship. The category “leader and follower relationship” included the following codes: types of followers (3), teams need both (9), teams are families (7), good leaders must be good followers (7), working towards shared goals (13), learn from each other (6), followers pick their leaders (6), and followers learn from their leaders (19). Throughout the data analysis process, it was evident that the participants perceived the relationship between leaders and followers correlates to a team's success. Moreover, participants discussed leaders and followers' roles within the team setting. Participant 2 stated,

I think that there's always going to be leaders and followers on teams or anywhere really [*teams need both*], but if everybody's trying to lead, it's

going to be so independent, and for (team sports), you really have to like work together it's a team sport you can't win without it.

Participant 5 echoed her words by describing how necessary it is to have followers: "you can't have a ton of leaders. You can't have 20 leaders on a team. Nothing would be completed" [*teams need both*]. He continued,

So there's things that you know I miss. So I think there's, you know, the guys can say to me, hey coach. I think that is good because, you know, they are teaching me as much as maybe I'm teaching them [*learning from each other*].

Recognizing the importance of leaders and followers learning from each other, Participant 6 stated, "As a coach, you learn from your players; every time you're working with a new team, you learn," [*learning from each other*] which suggested that both leaders and followers are vital roles within a team.

Multiple participants shared their perception that good leadership includes a stint of followership. Participant 4 said, "I mean, to be a good leader, you have to be a good follower at some point" [*leaders must be good followers*]. Participant 5 agreed, stating, "I think, really, to be a good leader, you have to be a good follower at some point, too. You have to understand what it's like to sit in that chair" [*leaders must be good followers*]. This idea was supported once more when Participant 9 declared,

I think your best leaders have the ability to follow. If they don't know how to follow, they're not going to know how to how to create that opportunity for others to follow [*leaders must be good followers*].

Integral to the leader-follower relationship is the recognition of how people choose whom to follow. Participant 2 described it as "We get to start like a domino effect of like, that's the person I follow, and I'm gonna lead, and then those people should follow me" [*leader and follower relationship*]. Participant 5 shared what he looks for in someone when choosing to follow: "leaders have to be able to convey the type of message that would be well received by you as a follower, to the point where I would want to follow whatever leader I'm choosing to follow" [*leaders*

have to be good followers]. Participant 2 shared an experience she had with leaders on a team, saying,

They kind of took on a leadership role the wrong way. So they didn't have the followers they should have had. People didn't want to follow them.

When you are a leader, you have to recognize people pick who to follow [*followers pick leaders*].

Participant 8 indicated that she chooses who to follow by watching what behavior they portray and then mimicking it [*followers pick leaders*].

The perception of participants relating to the leader and follower relationship highlighted that followers often choose to follow someone who has more experience. Participant 3 noted that he "looks to other players to see where I need to go" [*learning from each other*] when discussing who he follows.

Participant 2 described her experience, saying,

I think like starting on teams as a younger player, just because, like, if I come and I see a player who's older, captain, like, doing something, then I try to, like, emulate that to do a similar thing [*learning from each other*].

Participant 8 echoed this experience when she stated, "The seniors will like most likely, like know how the team is running in a sense. Sort of like keep it like how it sort of has been in the past and everything. So new team members should follow that" [*following more experienced*]. Similarly, Participant 9 noted,

We would have like captains and stuff like that, and I would kind of just, like, keep my head down but stick with them [*following more experienced*] and like always listen to what they're saying so that I can be successful and help the team in the future.

She went on to describe an experience she had as a new team member,

Well, freshman year, I was not a starter, or I was a starter, but I didn't earn my starting spot to like three or four games into the season. And I had a captain who played the exact same position as me, and so I would go with her out, and like we'd practice and do like extra stuff on the fields and stuff like that. And just her being able to, like, show me what to do and like, even like runs on the field where I needed to be and everything like that. I was

able to, like, implement that into like game situations when I did get put in, and then I ended up earning my starting spa because of her help [*following more experienced*]

Another critical code that emerged within the leader and follower relationship category related to understanding goals. Specifically, Participant 1 said, “Leaders and followers have to understand the goals and how we’re going to achieve them” [*understanding goals*]. Participant 2 noted, “If we all understand the goals, then whoever leads, we can easily follow” [*understanding goals*]. Similarly, Participant 4 said, “Everyone has to be on the same page, working towards the same goal” [*understanding goals*]. Participant 6 shared a practical example of how understanding the goal can be applied: “we walk out of the meeting. We’re all on the same page. There’s no, you know, going off-road to do something different than what we decided in the meeting” [*understanding goals*]. He went on to share an example from his collegiate career:

You know, I was a music major in college. All of that was about followership. All the teams that I played on all about followership; it's all about finding, finding what I call it is vision. Still, it's it's the goals and aspirations of the team unified, which is set primarily by the coach or leader [*understanding the goals*].

Similarly, Participant 7 shared ways that he perceives he is working towards team goals rather than his personal goals:

I think holistic vision of the of the program. So how can I help triathlon get started? You know, how can I help hockey get started? How can I help JV basketball? You know, with my players, those can how do we get more kids here by partnering with JV soccer’s kind of idea. I think that's a part of it [*shared goals*].

He summarized his thought: “Again, focusing on a bigger goal is a necessary component of good followership” [*understanding goals*]. Participant 10 summarized the importance of understanding goals, stating,

Truly, you’re all moving in as close to the same direction as possible, then you get the most out of yourself, which I think leads to tangible successes

because we're all locked in and focused on our team goals, on our ultimate goal [*understanding goals*].

Participants shared that teams have leaders and followers but also operate as families within the construct of leaders and followers and the relationship between them. Participant 1 shared that she rejoined athletics "to be with a team, a family unit [*teams are family*]" after taking a break from her athletic career. Participant 5 spoke of his perception of family-oriented teams and healthy relationships among team members, stating, "People talk to all these championship teams, and they always talk about this idea of family or the team chemistry, right? So that's the intangible that you can't really put your finger on" [*teams are family*]. Further, Participant 10 spoke about how familial love within a team can lead to motivation:

There's something to be said that you know when adversity hits, it's, it's not going to be you're not going to be motivated by some chip on your shoulder, you're going to be motivated by the culture and the love of each other and the respect for each other and what you've been through and the togetherness of a unified team [*teams are family*].

Components of the relationship between the leader and follower indicated teams as families, understanding unified goals, followers being selective in who they follow, and elements of why people choose to follow. Overall, there was a strong perception from participants that the relationship between leaders and followers is integral to the experiences on specific teams.

Skills Overlap. The category "skills overlap" included the following codes: similar skills (8) and fluid roles (26). The results of the data analysis indicated a significant perception that leader and follower roles overlap, are fluid, and are sometimes the same. Participant 1 spoke of her perception of the roles of leaders and followers and recognized that the roles are fluid, saying, "something you're in leadership, or something you're just part of the whole team" [*roles are fluid*]. Participant 2 explained further, "I think it depends on the situation," [*roles are fluid*] when asked if she was a leader or a follower, indicating that she could move between the two roles. She went on to share an example that highlighted how leader and follower roles are fluid:

Everybody's gonna have good days and bad days. It's gonna happen. So in those moments, we have bad plays. That to me, to be a leader in those moments looks like knowing we have a bad game but need to follow the players that are doing good even with the loss [*roles are fluid*]. So I think that everybody needs to be a leader at times. Everybody needs to be a follower at times [*roles are fluid*].

Participant 10 spoke of how he prefers leadership positions but can also assume the role of a follower when necessary:

I think I would describe myself as someone who understands their role, I guess, I would say, and so, you know, my age, having had leadership positions and also followership positions, I think that, you know, the awareness of kind of where, where I fall and what my role would be in that instance is, I think something I'm good at [*roles are fluid*].

Echoing him, Participant 9 stated, "I definitely think I have a little bit of both leader and follower" [*roles are fluid*]. Participant 6 described role fluidity with an example:

Well, if they're if they're seeing what's going on, no matter what head coach you are, you've got a boss. And your boss has a boss. And maybe your boss's boss has a boss. And so I guess we'd call it trickle down, but you know if if everything is running smoothly, then you've got leaders who can follow their leader and and that just kind of steps down the ladder all the way to the to the bottom [*roles are fluid*].

Participant 4 described herself as being someone who has filled all roles before:

I think it's that I've been in all roles [*roles are fluid*], whether it's like, I've been just on the team. I've been captain of teams, and then I've also coached teams [*roles are fluid*]. So I know, just like when I'm in a player role [*roles are fluid*], that I have to listen to the coaches.

The perception that leader and follower roles are fluid indicates the necessity that both roles require similar skill sets. Participant 5 noted, "I think depending on the job, and I think depending on the task that is required, you know, you need to be able to check off both boxes (of leader and follower)" [*roles are fluid*]. This

comment and the perception of many other participants indicate that leaders and followers must share similar skills to move from role to role.

Many participants indicated that the differences between leader and follower skills were few. Participant 3 shared, “I think, well, I think most of the skills are transferable” [*skills are similar*]. Participant 4 shared,

I think the skills should be pretty similar ... I mean, it’s all the same skills [*skills are similar*], just being able to communicate and being able to listen, it goes both ways for leaders and followers. So I think the skills are pretty similar [*skills are similar*].

Participant 7 noted that leader and follower skills “overlap,” whereas participant 10 stated, “The first thing that comes to my mind is that there’s a lot less differences between the two and there’s more similarities” [*skills are similar*]. He went on to share examples of skills that leaders and followers must have:

Like, I think that, you know like leaders and followers need to be good listeners, but but in different ways. I think that they need to have trust but in different ways. I think they need to have courage but in different ways. So in my mind, I see more similarities than I see differences, but just you have to see those traits through just a little bit of a different lens as a follower versus a leader [*skills are similar*].

Leader and Follower Communication. The category “leader and follower communication” included the following codes: leaders must effectively communicate (3) and negative communication is not helpful (4). Participants perceived that good leaders and good followers effectively communicate. Participant 1 shared that “leaders have to be able to effectively communicate the goals, but followers have to be able to effectively listen to what is being communicated” [*communication*]. Similarly, Participant 4 stated, “But I mean it’s all the same skills, just being able to communicate and being able to listen, it goes both ways for all of them” [*communication*].

Participants also shared their experiences where communication was poor and expressed that negative communication from one party or both prevents the ability to be a good leader or follower. Participant 2 shared a recent experience:

I get very involved and passionate. So I say things when I get super frustrated. And when I communicate, I direct what I feel towards players, and it can definitely come out negative almost 1,000% of the time, when like we have our team meetings and stuff [*negative communication*]. Of course, it was on Monday Coach talked about communication, and I was thinking like, “That’s to me like I need to work on being more positive” [*negative communication*].

Participant 7 expressed how bad communication decreases the ability to follow and ultimately team success, saying, “I think it’s just interesting how many people distract you from winning. So you’d almost maybe by creating a null statement, you could define what not to do as a follower” [*negative communication*]. Overall, the participant shared that leaders and followers should be able to have similar communication skills.

Theme 6: Leaders Should Promote Followership

The sixth theme, leaders should promote followership, emerged throughout the data analysis process. Theme 6 had 67 data segments within four categories: leaders set the boundaries (8), leaders’ actions (13), leader characteristics (22), and creating space for followership (8). The theme of leaders promoting followership was connected to RQ3: “How do student-athletes and coaches perceive the relationship between followership and leadership skills?” Three interview questions (Appendix B) were asked to understand the participants’ perception of the leader’s role in developing followership. Table 14 shows a summary of Theme 6, its categories, and occurrences within the data.

Table 14

Codebook for Theme 6: Leaders Should Promote Followership

Theme	Categories	Occ.
Leaders Should Promote Followership	Leaders Set the Boundaries	8
	Leaders’ Actions	13
	Leader Characteristics	22
	Creating Space for Followership	8

Leaders Set the Boundaries. The category “leaders set the boundaries” included the following codes: followers look to leaders to know what to do (3) and work within the leaders’ framework (5). Hurwitz and Hurwitz (2020) described how leaders within teams and organizations must set the framework, or the boundaries, for followers. Participant 1 noted, “We’re just talking about laying the framework because ... the coach does like the framework and even sort of team captains as well. But then the whole rest of the group has to come up and meet that” [*working within the framework*]. She shared a specific example:

So my coach used to ask different people if they wanted to lead a practice or like a captain's practice. Other team captains before me have had similar ones. So I was asked to do that because he's laid everything like the framework of how long it's going to be, and some of the requirements of it, and then we made our own workouts based off of it [*working within the framework*].

She also discussed how the follower is impacted by a leader’s boundaries, “In order to be like a follower, you have to be able to work within the frame” [*working within the framework*]. Participant 6 alluded to the importance of leaders setting the boundaries to promote good followership when he said, “As a leader, you have to be able to recognize the vision and help others act on that vision. I think that is the key to creating good followers” [*followers look to leaders*]. Adding to the importance of leaders creating a framework to promote followership, Participant 9 noted that without a leader’s guidance, followers might not know what to do: “no one really knew what to do without coaches” [*followers look to leaders*]. Participant 1 summarized, “So just the overall, part of just like working within the framework (set by the leaders) is just something that you’d see all the time” [*working within the framework*] when discussing her team.

Leaders Actions. The category “leaders’ actions” included the following codes: intentionally preparing followers (3), controlling the environment (2), and creating the framework (3). Participants shared their perceptions of leaders' actions and how they relate to followership. Participant 5 noted how challenging being a leader is and suggested, "Unfortunately, in my opinion, there are very few leaders,

true leaders, someone that you can look to and really respect and say I would work for you, or I would play for you.” He went on to speak of how leadership is often engrained in an individual’s character:

Talking all the time about leadership and developing leaders. I don't think you can do that. It's a waste of resources. I think. I think it's in you. You're either a leader or you're not. Now you can you can become a better leader with, you know, some of these seminars and some of these courses that you can lead. But you can't turn a non-leader into a leader, and some people are not leaders, and that's okay. You can't have a ton of leaders, and you can't have 20 leaders on a team.

Participant 10 had differing thoughts on how leader actions consider the needs of followers:

It's helped me see the varying layers of leadership and have an understanding that you can't do at all that you need to lean on your strengths while working on your areas for improvement. But also, it's helped me to see and putting together leadership groups, the importance of having multiple personalities and leadership styles within the group to connect with varying types of followers. So I think that's been more helpful. In terms of my approach and philosophy, than even being a student-athlete or being a team leader *[preparing followers]*.

When reflecting on his own leadership, Participant 5 shared that leaders must self-reflect to prepare followers:

Now, being a coach, it'd be on the other side, being a leader of that, you know, you kind of drawback to some of those experiences you had as a player, and you know, you try to adopt a leadership style that you yourself would have enjoyed to to play under. A leadership style that athletes can follow *[creating a framework]*.

He went on to share that to it is a leader’s responsibility to take action to ensure followers develop:

And we'll have conversations, and maybe it's, you know, to guide them and direct them a little bit. But at the end of the day, I think if they feel

ownership, it's almost like empowering them. But I have to help them get there as a leader [*preparing followers*].

Participant 3 noted how his experience with a good leader impacted the team in a good way. Specifically, he noted, "I would say the biggest thing they like, that he (the leader) was able to do was like control every situation in any environment" [*control the environment*]. Similarly, Participant 6 cited the importance of a leader being intentional, controlling the environment, and creating a framework to follow:

Yeah, it's, it's not an every-practice thing. But it's it's a, you know, twice, twice a week, kind of a thing where you've got to you've got to intentionally talk about these things so that it becomes ingrained in the culture. Yeah. Otherwise, they're gonna hear it once. They're gonna say, Oh, that's great. And then they're gonna forget it ever happened. [*preparing followers*]

Further, both student-athlete handbooks referenced the importance of being good teammates in order to develop into a good leader. Interestingly, neither specifically defined followership but both read, "working on your weaknesses, learning through competitive and cooperative experiences how to be a better teammate and in the future a good leader" [*creating a framework*].

Leader Characteristics. The category "leader characteristics" included the following codes: leading from the middle (3), motivating (1), engaged (1), having power (2), not seeing everything (4), knowledgeable (6), being in the forefront (1), dominant (3), charismatic (1), born not developed (3), approachable (6), and leader identity (7). As previously mentioned in Theme 5, participants perceive leadership and followership skills to be similar. Additionally, participants listed a variety of skills that leaders must have to promote followership. Participant 8 noted that she respects leaders who are engaged and caring:

Just like (the coaches) presence and stuff. Like that would always be a motivating factor for everyone and like, all of like, the sets and everything like just (the coach) like being on deck and like interested in all of our like lives in and out that would just like allow us to like follow and be comfortable and want to work harder [*motivating*].

Participant 1 described the skillsets of leaders:

Being an approachable leader is a must [*approachable*]. Or being a charismatic leader [*charismatic*] and especially being knowledgeable [*knowledgeable*] because if you're a leader and you don't know much about anything, nobody's going to respect you.

Participant 6 also noted a characteristic of leadership as knowledge when he shared a personal story:

Now that I'm, you know, the age that I am currently, definitely know that there's more that I don't know and that the stuff that I don't know is exponentially expanding day by day at this point. So, yeah, that realization that maybe my leaders know something that I don't know, and maybe I should pay attention to what they know [*leaders have knowledge*].

Participant 5 explained ways he tries to be a good leader:

What I do is, you know, I talk to them, I am approachable [*approachable*]. And I'm willing to have those conversations where they feel free to tell me what they think, which may not be aligned with what I think. But I tell them I want to hear it.

Similarly, Participant 8 shared that she believes good leaders are “vocal about their opinions” [*in the forefront*] while also “being willing to have a relationship with everyone on the team ... and knowing they're someone you can like go to if you need help” [*approachable*].

Participant 10 spoke of leadership skills he believes athletes look for when picking a coach:

I think in today's world, I think I think more than ever approachability and like likeableness [*approachable*]. I don't know if you see this or feel this as a coach. But 20-plus years of coaching, it's changed like if they don't like you in the recruiting process. It doesn't matter if you've won 800 games.

Yeah, they're not going to come play for you. Because this generation of kid wants to like their coach [*approachable*].

He went on to share skills he believes team leaders must have:

So as a leader, if you're talking about peer leadership like a captain, there has to be this. This likability, this approachability [*approachable*]. A genuine, authentic chameleon, someone who can shift personalities to connect with different types of followers and their personality because, in the end, right, as a leader, we're trying to create that level of trust [*trust*] and healthy loyalty [*loyalty*].

Participant 1 explained that a skill she attributed to becoming a strong leader was the ability to lead from within the team. She shared an example, “I was trying to help the team captain, or I was leading stretches when they weren’t there” [*leading from the middle*].

Creating Space for Followership. The category “creating space for followership” included the following codes: words must match actions (1) and promoting followers (12). Participant 4 mentioned that leaders must gain the commitment of followers. He said, “If somebody's saying something and then they're not doing it, why would I listen to you” [*words must match actions*].

Participant 1 described what type of leadership hinders followership: “More of like top-down sort of more angry type situation” [*not promoting followership*]. Participant 5 echoed these sentiments describing that authoritative leadership did not promote followership:

When I recall back to my playing days, we were just kind of told what to do. You know, it was just the whats and the hows. Never the why. It wasn't ever explained, you know, so it's just, you better do this or else you know, and I remember feeling kind of powerless [*not promoting followership*].

Participant 1 spoke of leaders' important role in creating the opportunity for followership. Specifically, she shared that the actions of leaders “allowed me to just be able to, sort of still thrive in the space of not being in a leadership role” [*promoting followers*]. Participant 10 noted how important recognizing the variety of followers on a team is: “But also, it's helped me to see and putting together groups, the importance of having multiple personalities and styles within the group to connect with varying types of followers” [*promoting followers*].

Summary

The results of the qualitative research revealed six major themes of the study: formation of followership, followership skills formed through sport, followership skills enhance life skills, effective followers enable team success, leadership and followership skills are transferable, and leaders should promote followership. Categories for each theme were also identified throughout the data analysis process. During the interviews, participants shared personal stories, examples, and scenarios that demonstrated these six themes. Specifically, participants shared not only stories and experiences relating to their time as collegiate athletes and coaches but also stories from developmental teams before the collegiate level. There were no apparent differences in the findings of participants from the different participating institutions or sports. Although this research contributed to a better understanding of all research questions posed, opportunities for future studies exist relating to collegiate athletics and followership development. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the importance and relevance of the research findings.

Chapter 5 – Discussion

The purpose of the current study was to examine the involvement of athletic participation in the development of followership. Recognizing the role athletics plays in the development of an individual (Gellock et al., 2019), the researcher explored how athletic participation develops followership. Student-athletes and coaches from two separate institutions shared experiences relating to their time involved with collegiate athletics and the contributions they perceived athletics has on followership skills. This chapter addresses the importance and relevance of the research findings and includes a discussion of the theoretical and practical implications of the findings and an outline of recommendations for future research.

Research Questions

The following four research questions were answered through the findings:

- RQ₁: How do athletic participation experiences contribute to the participants' followership skills?
- RQ₂: How do student-athletes and coaches perceive the role of athletic participation in developing followership skills?
- RQ₃: How do student-athletes and coaches perceive the relationship between followership and leadership skills?
- RQ₄: How do the perceptions of coaches and student-athletes differ concerning the role of athletic participation in developing followership skills?

The findings indicated that student-athletes and coaches attribute athletic participation to developing followership skills. Further, participants shared stories and examples of a variety of ways that followership skills were developed during practices and games. The study's findings also indicated that coaches and athletes perceive leadership and followership skills to be the same. However, the application of skills may differ depending on the role. Lastly, coaches and student-athletes did not have significant differences of opinion on the role of athletic participation in developing followership skills.

Research Question One

As followership theory develops, agreement on the skills needed to be a good follower varies (Larsson & Nielsen, 2021; Ndonye, 2022). The purpose of the current research study was to examine the perception of good followers' skills and how sports contributed to developing those skills. Specifically, RQ1 was “How do athletic participation experiences contribute to the participant’s followership skills?” During the research design, interview questions (IQs) 1-4 were created to guide participants toward explaining their perception of sports contributions toward followership skills. Two themes emerged in the results related to RQ1: formation of followership (Theme 1) and followership skills formed through sports (Theme 2).

Theme 1: Formation of Followership. Similar to Grant et al.’s (2021) workshop, IQ1 and IQ2 prompted participants to state if they believed they are a follower and to understand the participants’ preconceived opinions on the subject. Further, the last question of the interview asked the participant if they believed they were a follower. Interestingly, participants who identified as leaders later answered that they often fulfill the follower role. Moreover, participants who initially identified as a follower later declared that they had a better understanding of their role as a follower after viewing followership through the lens of athletic teams.

IQ3 was “What components of athletic participation contributed towards your perception of being a follower?” In response to this question, many participants shared stories of experiences they associated with being a follower. It was evident that participants believed their time in athletics from a young age played a significant role in developing their ability to recognize followership and be good followers. The participants explained what they believed contributed to the formation of followership. Examples included understanding their personal goals, taking action within the team to develop follower skills, and being aware of their feelings as a follower.

Throughout the discussion of followership development and contributions to an individual’s followership skills, participants shared the importance of feelings. It was evident that negative feelings related to the idea of being a follower existed, specifically for student-athletes rather than coaches. Further, participants

cited those negative feelings such as powerless, regret, nervousness, frustration, and anxiety often allowed them to reflect on their ability to follow and on ways to mitigate these feelings. Ultimately, coaches and athletes attributed negative feelings to being components of their followership development as they were able to recognize characteristics and traits that did not empower them to follow.

When discussing opportunities to be engaged as a follower, participants cited feeling important, considered, and contributing as components that aided in their ability to practice and develop followership skills. Recent research has indicated that when leaders create an environment of psychological safety for followers, productivity is increased (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2021). Excerpts from various interviews with student-athletes and coaches indicated that participants' responses in the current study support Mayfield and Mayfield's (2021) claims. Specifically, participants indicated that when leaders made them feel valuable and recognized their contributions to the team, they were able to be better followers and continue to develop effective follower skills. Ultimately, participants perceived that followership skills could be developed in various ways. However, they continued to attribute their drive to succeed to contributions within sports teams and an awareness that each player has a critical role as leading factors in their formation of followership.

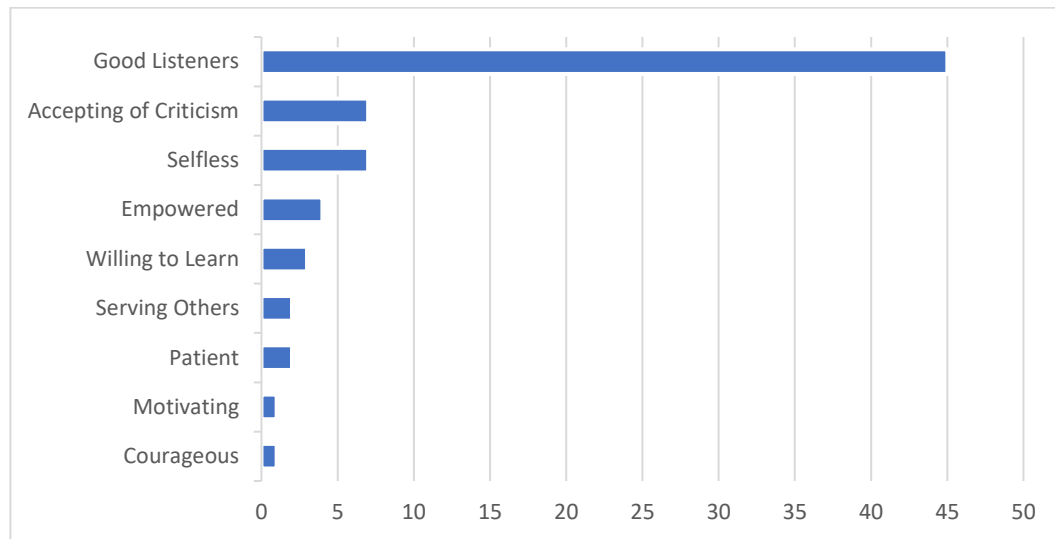
Theme 2: Followership Skills Formed Through Sport. IQ4 was asked to prompt participants to describe what they believed were good followership skills. Further, this question was asked before giving the participants a scholarly definition of followership. Table 1 outlines the development of followership characteristics in scholarly research from 1992 to the present. Participants in the current study did not perceive Kelley's (1992) suggested skills such as passiveness, conforming, compliance, and subordinates as followership skills. Instead, participants perceived follower skills to be in line with studies conducted by Carsten et al.'s (2010), Kellerman (2008), Cox et al. (2010), and Ndongye (2022), as seen in Figure 1.

Although understanding followership skills in depth was not a goal of the current study, the significance surrounding followership skills that arose in

response to IQ3 and IQ4 was impactful. Specifically, when interviewees were asked what characteristics of good followers are (IQ4), all participants quickly noted listening. Many participants described followership traits as being selfless, patient, and courageous. However, with over 45 occurrences, it was evident that listening was a skill that participants believed every follower must exhibit. Interestingly, participants shared components of listening consistent with Baker et al.'s (2019) outline of effective listening. Moreover, Fine (2022) noted how “transformative listening spaces” (p. 37) are integral to effective leadership. Based on the findings of the current study, it could also be argued that transformative listening spaces are an integral component of effective followership.

Baker et al. (2019) suggested that listening be a three-prong process where individuals listen for content, listen for meaning and intent, and listen for feelings of value. Similarly, some student-athletes mentioned the importance of team members listening to learn rather than just to hear. Coaches cited the importance of listening to their teammates to understand their feelings and intent. Although listening alone does not fuel good followership, listening to understand is an integral component of effective followership.

Results relating to RQ1 of the current study strongly indicated that participants believe followership skills can be developed through athletics. Moreover, the study's results revealed various perceived skills and characteristics of good followers, as shown in Figure 1. Participants shared examples of teammates, coaches, and themselves describing the importance of being a team player, creating cohesion, having good communication, and fulfilling the roles needed for the team. Baird and Benson (2022) suggested that effective teamwork must be prioritized for followership to flourish. Moreover, Billsberry et al. (2018) pressed followers' vital role in a team. Considering this research's findings, the current study's results support the research and indicate that the dynamics of a sports team create an environment for followership skills to flourish.

Figure 1*Characteristics of Followers***Research Question Two**

Although sports participation often promotes the development of participants, a limited time has been spent exploring the relationship between sport involvement and leadership and followership skills (Baird & Benson, 2022; Grai, 2023; Hardin, 2015). The purpose of the current research study was to understand better how participants perceived athletic participation develops followership skills. Specifically, RQ2 was, “How do student-athletes and coaches perceive the role of athletic participation further develops followership skills?” During the research design, IQs 5-7 were created to facilitate conversation to allow participants to share their beliefs on sports contributions to followership development. Two themes emerged in the results related to RQ2: followership skills enhance life skills (Theme 3) and effective followers enable team success (Theme 4).

Theme 3: Followership Skills Enhance Life Skills. Recognizing how athletic teams are comprised mostly of followers (Huntrods et al., 2017; Richard, 2020), IQ5 was asked to prompt participants to share their perception of how sports contributed to building followership skills. It was evident during interview discussions that participants felt strongly that athletics played a critical role in developing followership skills. All 10 participants declared that their ability to

practice followership skills was honed and developed as athletes. Moreover, participants emphasized how good followership skills are a necessary life skill. Athletes expressed appreciation for their learned follower skills that can be applied in school, relationships, and work environments. Coaches described the importance of remembering that developing student-athletes is more important than having a winning season. Therefore, it is necessary to understand what sort of activities and behaviors within sports contributed to gaining followership skills for life.

IQ6 prompted participants to share an example of when they believed they had the opportunity to develop followership skills within collegiate athletics. Responses to these questions allowed a better understanding of how followership skills are currently being developed within sports. While participants shared various examples, stories, and memories, common themes emerged in how they perceived followership skills developed within sports. Specifically, many participants shared stories of their perception of developing followership skills through personal sacrifice. All participants also indicated that listening, a necessary characteristic of followership, is developed within athletics due to the need to listen and understand other team members and coaches.

Theme 4: Effective Followers Enable Team Success. Hurwitz and Hurwitz (2015) indicated a direct relationship between followership and organizational success. IQ7 was asked to prompt participants to explain their perception of the relationship between followership and team success to better explore team success within athletics. Confirming earlier findings (Agho, 2009), all participants agreed that good followership is an integral and necessary component of team success. Participants suggested that they believed teams cannot succeed without good followership. To further understand how followership contributes to team success, IQ8 was asked to prompt participants to share an example of where they recognized followership skills contributing to tangible success. Stories of team members sacrificing their personal time, personal goals, and personal accolades to ensure the team improved were prevalent. Further, some participants shared examples of when team members and coaches' poor communication, selfishness, or lack of focus negatively impacted team success, citing poor followership.

The results relating to RQ3 of the current study indicated that participants believed participation in athletics plays a substantial role in the development of followership. Moreover, some participants suggested that without their experiences in athletics, gaining followership skills would have been more challenging. The results of the current study indicated that followership skills are developed through the sheer nature of sports. However, participants indicated that healthy team environments, clear direction from leadership, and team member buy-in were all necessary factors in developing good followership.

Research Question Three

The relationship between leadership and followership skills is rarely examined. Leadership skills have long been studied and continue to evolve as the need to understand what skillset is necessary to be considered for leadership roles. Further, recent researchers have sought to understand followership skills better. Specifically, Akhilele et al. (2021) examined followership skills and discovered 21 emergent skills necessary for good followership. Young et al. (2020) outlined 14 different followership skills necessary for success. However, few researchers have examined the relationship between followership and leadership skills. Therefore, RQ3 was, “How do student-athletes and coaches perceive the relationship between followership and leadership skills?” IQ9 and IQ10 were used to challenge participants to share how they believe leadership and followership skills intersect. Further, IQ11 and IQ12 were asked to prompt participants to share examples of when nonleaders and leaders created influence. Two themes emerged in the results related to the third research question: leadership and followership skills are transferable (Theme 5), and leaders should promote followership skills (Theme 6).

Theme 5: Leadership and Followership Skills are Transferable. IQ9 was “What is the difference between followership and leadership skills?” Similar to Baird and Benson’s (2022) discoveries, the results from the study indicate that participants perceived no difference in the skills needed to be a good follower and a good leader. Although Hurwitz and Hurwitz (2015) suggested that leaders and followers must each have a “distinct set of skills” (p. 20), participants in the current study perceived that the skills of a good leader and a good follower are not

different. Specifically, participants consistently shared that they believed the skills overlapped or were similar. Some participants shared that skills for good leaders and followers are the same but often practiced differently.

Many participants agreed that good leaders must have been good followers first, indicating that the skills to become a good leader can be developed through followership. The results of Baird and Benson's (2022) study supported these findings, which suggested that teammates with good leadership abilities also possess good followership skills. Further, participants in the current study cited the importance of leaders and followers effectively communicating to work towards the same shared goal. Ultimately, over 100 data segments in the results of the current study indicated that participants believed leader and follower skills are transferable.

Many participants described the roles of a leader and follower as being fluid when discussing the relationship between leaders and followers. Under the guise of shared leadership, Baker et al. (2011) suggested that good followers practice the behaviors of excellent leaders, indicating fluidity between the roles. Stern (2020) agreed, stating that every role in life requires the behaviors of effective leaders and followers. Participants in the current study recognized that as team members, they have to be able to act in a follower role and a leadership role, dependent on what is best for the team. Further, the participants shared how important it is for athletes to recognize when to be a leader and when to be a follower. Interestingly, the perception of the participants regarding role fluidity aligned with Hurwitz and Hurwitz's (2015) example of role fluidity when describing a basketball game where the roles of the decision maker change as the ball is passed.

In addition to recognizing when to lead or follow, coaches shared how challenges and conflict from followers can be good but have to be controlled. Athletes spoke of times when the best thing for the team is for athletes to focus on their specific job to ensure overall success. Many athlete participants shared similar ideas suggesting that in any given game or practice, they have to fulfill the role of leader and follower. Ultimately, the perception that leader and follower roles are fluid supported earlier beliefs from participants that the skillset of leaders and followers is transferable.

Theme 6: Leaders Should Promote Followership Skills. To better understand how leadership contributes to followership, IQ10, “What components of leadership do you believe contribute to the development of followership behaviors?” was asked. Earlier findings by Wang et al. (2020) suggested that leaders must create an environment for followers to flourish, take charge, and be effective to achieve success. Consistent with Wang et al.’s findings, the participants in the current study shared examples of how various leaders facilitated opportunities for followership development.

Coach participants shared actions they take with their team members and athletes, indicating that they believe these actions helped team members be better followers. Specific actions they shared that contributed to developing followership included listening, being approachable, and creating a unified sense of ownership and buy-in amongst team members. Likewise, Taylor and Hill (2017) described the importance of leadership supporting followership by indicating that good leaders “who foster effective followership” (p. 36) would see an increase in team and organizational success.

The idea that leadership must promote followership is consistent with the suggestion that promoting group functioning between leaders and followers is necessary for success (Baird & Benson, 2022; Hurwitz & Hurwitz, 2015). Athlete participants described what they look for in coaches and leaders as setting the framework, being knowledgeable, approachable, and willing to listen. Athlete participants indicated that these attributes of good leaders create the opportunity for followership. Interestingly, the participants described these same attributes as skills of good followers in earlier questions within the study. Ultimately, the participants perceived that the actions of leaders should create the environment and facilitate the promotion of followership skills.

Research Question Four

The results of the current study have led to a better understanding of how athletic participation contributes to developing followers. Participants described countless examples of how participating in age group, high school, and collegiate sports contributed to developing their followership skills. Though research on

followership has grown, it is often from the perspective of a leader or the perspective of a follower. Consistent with suggestions by Kellerman (2008), Riggio (2014), and Uhl-Bien and Carsten (2018), the researcher sought to take the focus off just the leader and prioritize the perspectives of leaders and followers. Specifically, the aim of this study was to examine the perceptions of coaches and student-athletes to contrast and compare leader and follower perspectives.

RQ4 was, “How do the perceptions of coaches and student-athletes differ concerning the role of athletic participation in developing followership skills?” RQ4 was theoretical. Therefore, all 13 interview questions and emergent themes contributed to understanding student-athletes and coaches' different perceptions of followership development. Although there were nuanced differences in the responses of coaches and student-athletes, there were no significant differences in the perspectives of the two groups.

The study's results captured the voices of six student-athletes from different sports teams. When initially asked if they were followers, student-athletes predominately agreed that they were acting in a followership role. However, participants cited that due to years on a team, or years of experience as a follower, they can transition to a leadership role when the opportunity is presented, as supported by Gordon et al. (2015) and Van Vugt et al. (2008). Meanwhile, the study included the perspectives of four coaches from different sports teams. When coaches were asked if they believed they were followers, they initially hesitated, indicating that they were leaders but could be effective followers when necessary, which Geer (2014) described as a challenge in leadership and followership. Coaches mentioned that their experiences as athletes before becoming coaches contributed to their ability to transition between leader and follower roles easily. Kaufman et al.'s (2021) Möbius strip explanation best conceptualizes the experiences of coach participants, where leadership and followership roles are complementary and necessary for success.

The data analysis showed that student-athletes and coaches' perceptions of the development of followership through sports were consistent. Both groups identified with being a follower but recognized how leader and follower roles are

fluid. However, it was apparent that coaches were initially more positive and accepting of their follower roles, while student-athletes remained defensive when first asked if they were followers. Student-athletes shared stories and perspectives of their current teams, describing good followership, bad followership, and team success. Coaches shared memories from their collegiate teams but also spoke of how leaders try to create opportunities for their team members to develop followership. Ultimately, the main difference in the perception of followership development between student-athletes and coaches appeared to be maturity. Specifically, coaches provided more maturity and growth with the ability to reflect on past experiences and recognize mistakes as a leader and follower. Student-athletes carried more pride around the term leader, indicating less maturity than coaches, and showed less self-reflection on their own abilities as a follower.

Although there was little difference in the perspective of student-athletes and coaches on how sports involvement contributed to followership, there were nuanced differences. Coaches cited their experiences on multiple teams over a completed athletic career as integral to their ability to move fluidly between the leader-follower roles. Therefore, there is a need to further explore followership development. Specifically, as individuals develop through team experiences, they become more accepting of their role as followers. Creating the opportunity to develop followership in young athletes intentionally could contribute to the earlier development of followership skills, leading to quicker team success.

Implications

Researchers such as Uhl-Bien et al. (2014), Avolio and Reichard (2008), and Kellerman (2008) made the call to explore followership through the lens of followers. Avolio and Reichard (2008) stressed the importance of followers being complementary to leaders rather than secondary. Uhl-Bien et al. (2014) criticized the small lens used to view followers and argued that leaders could only exist with followers. Although previous researchers have pressed the necessity to understand the contributions of followers better, in the current study, the researcher explored the perspective of followers within teams. Ultimately, the findings presented in this study have theoretical and practical implications. The current study's theoretical

implications could catapult the need to understand followership development within sports further. Practical implications of the current study could include informing ways to develop followership skills within athletes effectively. Overall, the theoretical and practical implications of the current study could bridge the gap between leadership and followership, indicating the importance of encompassing skill sets to be both an effective leader and follower.

Theoretical Implications

Several theoretical implications have emerged from the current research study. First, it was evident that participants believed sports involvement contributed to their ability to develop followership skills. There was a shared perception from participants that through life experiences, followership skills are developed, which supports Stern's (2020) findings. However, without the contributions of sports and team participation, the ability to develop effective followership skills would have been more challenging.

Another theoretical implication that arose from the current study was the identification of followership characteristics. Specifically, the participants in the current study indicated that effective followers must be able to listen, be selfless, and accept criticism (Figure 1). Beyond describing follower characteristics, the participants shared that leadership and followership skills are transferable. Therefore, because the current study revealed that leader and follower skills are transferrable, there is a need to focus more attention on how these shared skills are developed within followers.

In addition to continued exploration of transfer of follower skills, it could be impactful for literature on followership to further explore the characteristic of listening. Youngblood (2022) stated often in the leadership construct, individuals want leaders to listen. Bryant and Sharer (2021) suggested that listening is critical for leaders to be effective. Therefore, further exploration of how followers perceive the characteristic of listening to be necessary within the leader-follower dynamic could further advance the construct of followership.

The next theoretical implication of the current study is that effective followers enable team success. This finding supports Agho (2009) who suggested

that effective followership directly correlated with improved group performance. Further theoretical implications relate to the idea that the necessary skillsets of effective leaders and followers are similar. Supporting Baird and Benson (2022), the current research findings indicate that individuals who develop effective follower skills will ultimately possess effective leadership skills. Therefore, a better understanding of how to develop followership skills is necessary.

Previous researchers have examined followership through either the lens of a leader or a follower. The aim of the current study was to bridge the gap and explore the perspective of followers through the lens of leaders and followers. Upon comparison, it was evident that leaders and followers shared similar perspectives on the importance of the follower role within a team. However, coaches in the current study held a higher awareness of the role of a follower. Specifically, student-athlete participants identified with being a follower and shared surface-level examples of followership taking place. Meanwhile, coaches further recognized how their actions contributed to effective followership. Coaches were also able to synthesize their experiences and share that often, as young followers, they had to learn from examples and sometimes fail, but with more practice and sports involvement they were able to develop healthy, effective follower skills. Therefore, another theoretical implication revealed in the current study relates to equipping student-athletes with followership development opportunities earlier in their careers rather than allowing followership to develop organically over a long-term career.

Practical Implications

In addition to theoretical implications, there are several practical implications from the results of the current research study. The results of the current research indicate that sports involvement is critical to developing followership skills in individuals. Interactions between coaches, athletes, team members, and opponents are all critical in developing good followership skills. Therefore, coaches and team personnel at all sports levels should consider ways to create a followership culture. Specifically, coaches could incorporate shared leadership practices, which could develop feelings of ownership within the team,

and provide a team culture to eliminate individual success and prioritize team success. In applying changes such as these, leaders will build a team culture to facilitate role assignment to team members where every individual must operate within their role for teams to achieve success. Further, through buy-in and ownership, leaders will hold followers accountable for contributing to team success.

Another practical implication would be the discussion of followership skills within sports and their transferability outside of sports. The current study revealed that followership skills enhance life skills. The participants in the current study indicated that being a good listener is a necessary skill of good followers and leaders. Further, the participants believed that success improves when teams have effective followers. Coaches and sports administrators could discuss with team members what followership skills are (Figure 1) and the critical role follower skills play in productivity beyond the team and in life. Additionally, effective listening workshops could be used to develop listening skills in teams to ensure both followers and leaders are building necessary skills and habits to become effective listeners.

Lastly, there was a significant perception that leader and follower skills are similar and transferable. Recognizing the relationship between these skills, I believe coaches and sports administrators should guide student-athletes in developing followership skills. Although leadership development opportunities for student-athletes exist (Voight & Hickey, 2016; Weaver & Simet, 2015), followership development opportunities are lacking. Reversing the lens of leadership (Shamir, 2007), the SALA could be redesigned as the Student-Athlete Followership Academy (SAFA). Rather than allowing only formal leaders to participate, the SAFA could allow entire teams to participate in the workshop. Interactive workshops could be conducted to introduce and normalize the construct of followership. Role-play for all participants could guide individuals in being aware of the necessity of effective followers in a team. Ultimately, sharing the construct of followership with student-athletes and creating opportunities for individuals to practice follower skills could contribute to followership

development, which would lead to improving team success, student-athlete experience, and developing the future generation.

Limitations

There are several limitations to the current research study. The first limitation is based on site selection. Those recruited for the study were student-athletes or coaches at small, private, liberal-art universities in Upstate New York. Sports involvement at small universities may provide a different experience than participation at a more prominent university. Although two institutions were included in this study, a cross-case analysis was not conducted. A further limitation relating to the site selection was the lack of participation from Institution B. Specifically, only two student-athletes and one coach chose to participate from Institution B. Additionally, female coach participation was limited. Consistent with the lack of female representation in collegiate athletics, no female coaches volunteered to participate in the study.

In this phenomenological case study, the researcher also conducted interviews and examined institutional documents. After analysis, the student-athlete handbooks from each institution were significantly lacking. Moreover, the handbooks contained an outline of the consequences for student-athlete actions but not the many opportunities for growth and development. Specifically, the study design did not allow for triangulation of data from interviews and handbooks due to the lack of content in the document analysis sources. Furthermore, the research study did not include observations of participants engaged in team activities. Therefore, the study only included the participants' subjective perceptions of their experiences on teams and the development of followership.

Another limitation of the current study relates to the use of Zoom for all interviews. Although online videoconferencing created convenience for the researcher and the participants, limitations exist. Specifically, nonverbal communication and body language during the interviews were not as visible due to the nature of Zoom. Further, due to many participants not having a relationship with the researcher before the interviews, responses over Zoom seemed shortened

initially; however, as the conversations continued, participants became more comfortable.

Lastly, a standard limitation of phenomenological research is researcher bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher attempted to eliminate bias by not inputting personal opinions during interviews and analysis. However, there is a possibility that unconscious bias occurred due to the researcher being a former student-athlete and current collegiate head coach.

Suggestions for Future Research

The current study's results provided important feedback on the contributions of sport involvement to followership skills. Further, a better understanding of the relationship between leader and follower skill sets has been revealed. However, further investigation is needed to continue enhancing followership literature, developing followers, and guiding individuals in understanding followers' critical roles within teams.

First, the study could be replicated, as I believe there would be no significant differences in emergent themes and findings. Specifically, replicating the study at other institutions and within different geographical locations could create validity in the findings. Replicating the current study would allow an opportunity to enhance followership literature further.

Second, I believe a longitudinal study would be necessary for a better understanding of the contributions of sport involvement in developing skills. Specifically, a longitudinal study could be conducted to examine an age group athlete through their collegiate career. The results could then be compared to a non-athlete, who could serve as the placebo. Conducting a longitudinal study on sports involvement, specifically to examine the development of skills relating to followership and leadership could further validate the importance of followership development.

Third, additional research is needed to understand the relationship between followership skills and leadership abilities. The results of the current study indicated that leader and follower skills are similar. With significant research on the characteristics of leaders, I believe examining the relationship between the

characteristics of leaders and followers would allow for a deeper understanding of the relationship between an individual's ability to lead and follow.

Fourth, a best practices manual should be developed to guide athletic coaches and team administrators in facilitating the development of followership skills. Specifically, guidelines for incorporating followership development into portions of a practice or team event could lead to increased followership within the team. Activities to be included should be limited to short interactions that create follower buy-in, force the awareness of various follower roles, or create an opportunity for team members to role-play good and bad followership scenarios.

Lastly, with sports teams being mostly comprised of followers, I believe it is pertinent that leadership development programs are designed to reverse the lens (Shamir, 2007). Therefore, a workshop academy for followership development could be created for student-athletes. Though activities similar to those recommended for coaches could be facilitated, enhanced exploration of followership could be examined over a multi-day workshop. Student-athletes could understand followership, apply followership skills practically, and develop their ability to recognize good followership abilities.

Conclusion

The purpose of this phenomenological case study was to explore the perception of sport involvement in followership development. The research included an exploration of the experiences of six collegiate student-athletes and four collegiate head coaches. Ultimately, the goal for this research was to understand better how team members perceived sports involvement contributed to developing follower skills and what the participants perceived as effective follower skills. Further, I explored the relationship between leadership and followership skills. Lastly, I examined the perspectives of coaches versus student-athletes. The study's results confirmed that sports involvement contributed to developing followership skills. Further, the results supported previous research (Agho, 2009), which indicated that effective followership increases team success. The findings of the study also revealed that leadership and followership skills are transferable, which supports research relating to leader and follower skill sets and fluidity (Baird

& Benson, 2022). There are several theoretical and practical implications of the current research study and numerous recommendations for future research. Although there were significant nuanced findings throughout the study, the research findings showed that sports involvement is influential in developing followership skills. Recognizing that collegiate student-athletes go on to become employees in workplaces where followership is necessary, the impact of collegiate sports on the development of individuals and their ability to contribute to society should not go unnoticed.

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Appendix A

Interview Consent Form

You are invited to take part in up to two research interviews on DATE TBD.

You were chosen for the interview because you are a student-athlete, athletic coach, or athletic administrator at the collegiate level. Please read this form and ask any questions you have before agreeing to be part of the interview.

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

Background Information:

The purpose of this interview is to learn about the participant's perception of followership skills after being part of an intercollegiate varsity sport team.

Procedures:

If you agree, you will be asked to participate in two (2) video/audio-recorded interviews, lasting approximately 45-60 minutes.

Voluntary Nature of the Interview:

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 or your current institution 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 Interview:

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. The facilitator will benefit by collecting data for the current study.

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 interview project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in any reports of the interview.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher's name is Sara Smith. The researcher's course instructor is Dr. Joshua Henson. You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via email at ssmith2@seu.edu or the instructor at jdhenson@seu.edu. If you want to communicate privately about your rights as a participant, you can contact 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 Protocol

1. Would you describe yourself as a follower? [RQ1]
2. Why do you perceive yourself as a follower or not? [What were you thinking as you answered that question]. [RQ1]
3. What components of your athletic experience shaped your response to question one? [RQ1]
4. What do you believe are the behaviors, skills, and attitudes of a strong follower?

Followership Definition:

Followership is the acceptance and dedication from individuals towards the purpose and goals of an organization or the organization's leader (Carsten & Uhl-Bien, 2012; Gilstrap & Morris, 2015; Hamlin, 2016; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014).

5. How did your athletic career contribute to developing followership skills? [RQ2]
6. Can you provide an example of a time during your athletic career where you had an opportunity to develop followership skills? [RQ2]
7. In what ways, if at all, does followership skills contribute to team success? [RQ2]
8. Can you provide an example of a time during your athletic career where you believe followership skills contributed to team success? [RQ2]
9. In your estimation, what is the difference between followership skills and leadership skills? [RQ3]

10. What components of leadership do you believe contribute to the development of followership behaviors? [RQ3]
11. Can you provide an example where yourself or a team member utilized followership behaviors to influence and / or lead others? [RQ3]
12. Can you think of a time where a coach or team leader practiced or modeled followership behaviors to influence and / or lead others? [RQ3]
13. To close out our conversation, I'd like to ask you again... are you a follower? Why or why not? [RQ1]

Appendix C

Invitation to Institution to Participate in Case Study

Good Afternoon,

My name is Sara Smith, formally Sara Weigel-Smith and I am a doctorate student at Southeastern University where I am working on my dissertation in Organizational Leadership. I am reaching out to you to ask if you would be willing to participate in my qualitative study on the development of followership.

Ultimately, I am hoping to gather 3-4 student-athletes (ideally who participate with SAAC) and 2-3 head coaches to participate in interview discussions this spring for my study.

The focus of my study is on the development of followership skills among student-athletes. Specifically, the purpose of my study is noted below:

When analyzing leadership abilities, the process of followership is often overlooked. Researchers have suggested that effectively developing followership could aid in the growth of leadership abilities, as followership is part of the process of effective leadership (Leo et al., 2019; Thompson, 2020). Therefore, the purpose of the proposed qualitative study will be to describe the perception of student-athletes relating to if followership skills were developed during collegiate athletic participation.

To effectively investigate the development of followership skills within athletic participation, the proposed study will employ a social constructivism framework to ensure participants express their own perceived context (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The goal of the proposed study is to better understand student-athlete perceptions relating to followership development. Therefore, interviews will be used to will explore a range of individual perceptions (Krueger & Casey, 2015) of followership ability while exploring factors that aid in developing followership. Additionally, document analysis will be conducted to examine the framework used to develop leadership within teams.

As I am in the early stages of designing my study, I am working to gather interest in participating first from you and then from any institutional administrators that might require IRB (research activity) approval. I'd love to answer any questions you might have related to this and look forward to hearing back from you regarding participation in my study.

Thank you,

Sara Smith

Appendix D

Invitation to Participants to Participate in Study

Hello coaches and athletes,

My name is Sara Weigel-Smith and I am a PhD candidate in Organizational Leadership at Southeastern University. As part of my research, I am exploring the perception of how sport involvement influences followership development. For this study, I am hoping to conduct interviews with head coaches and student-athletes who are current members of an NCAA sponsored sport team. Interviews will take place over Zoom and will last approximately 45-60 minutes. Prospective participants names and email addresses will be collected solely for correspondence purposes. All identifiable information will be removed from transcriptions and manuscripts. The approval of this study by SEU's IRB Board, Nazareth College's IRB Board*, and Roberts Wesleyan IRB board* is on file and can be produced upon request. There is no payment or reward for participating in this study.

If you would like to participate in this study, please complete this brief survey (approximately 2-3 minutes) to indicate your interest in participating in this study: <https://forms.gle/nx7Tksyg3v8UV7iW8>

If you fit the participant criteria, you will be contact directly to schedule an interview. If you would like to know any more information regarding this study, please email me directly at ssmith2@seu.edu. Additionally, you may contact my chair, Dr. Joshua Henson at jdhenson@seu.edu.

Your help and participation in this research is appreciated!

Regards,

Sara Weigel-Smith

**Only the institution of the recipients will be revealed as to not reveal the other participating schools.*

Appendix E

Online Questionnaire to Review Eligibility for Participation

Does Athletic Participation Develop Followership?

Dear Prospective Participant,

This is a request for your participation in a research project exploring followership development among student-athletes. This study is being conducted by Sara Weigel-Smith of Southeastern University (SEU) under the supervision of Dr. Joshua Henson, Associate Professor at SEU.


By completing this survey you are indicating an interest in participating in the study. Select individuals who complete this survey will be contacted to coordinate a Zoom interview. Your participation in this study will take approximately 60 minutes. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate. There will be no compensation for your participation.

Participation in this research study will be kept confidential. All data will be confidential and securely stored. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You may skip any question that you do not wish to answer, and you may discontinue at any time. The SEU Institutional Review Board as well as your institutions IRB committee have approved this project and you may request copies of the files at any time.

If you have questions about this study, please contact me at ssmith2@seu.edu or contact Dr. Henson at jdhenson@seu.edu.

I hope that you will participate in this research project, as it may help us better understand how to further develop student-athletes. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Sara Weigel-Smith

 ssmith2@seu.edu (not shared) [Switch account](#)



* Required

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study and I understand that I can stop participating at any time. Further, I understand that completing this survey does not mean I will be selected for an interview, just that I may be considered for participation. *

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

What is your e-mail address (Please note: e-mail addresses will only be used to coordinate Zoom interviews; no identifying information will be shared in transcriptions or manuscripts) *

Your answer _____


Please select what your role on your current team is *

- Student-Athlete
- Head Coach

Next

Clear form

Does Athletic Participation Develop Followership?

 ssmith2@seu.edu (not shared) [Switch account](#)



* Required

Student-Athlete's

If you have arrived at this section you have indicated that you are a student-athlete on an NCAA team. Please answer the questions below:

Please indicate the number of years you have been a student-athlete at the collegiate level *

- One
- Two
- Three
- Four
- Five

Please indicate your number of years of sport involvement as an athlete PRIOR to *
your collegiate career

- 1-2 years
- 3-4 years
- 5+ years

Are you a team captain of your current college team? *

- Yes
- No

Please describe any formal leadership roles you have held within your current or
past team(s)

Your answer

Please describe any informal leadership roles you have held within your current or
past team(s)

Your answer

Are you a member of Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC)? *

Yes

No

If you are a member of SAAC, please describe your responsibilities / involvement.

Your answer

What is your gender?

Female

Male

Other: _____

What sport do you participate in at the NCAA level?


Your answer

Back

Submit

Clear form

Does Athletic Participation Develop Followership?

 ssmith2@seu.edu (not shared) [Switch account](#)



* Required

Head Coaches

If you have arrived at this section you have indicated that you are the head coach of an NCAA team. Please answer the questions below:

How many years have you been head coach of your current (collegiate) team ? *

- 1-2 years
- 3-4 years
- 5-6 years
- 7-10 years
- 10+ years

In addition to your current team, how many years of coaching experience do you have? *

- 0 years
- 1-2 years
- 3-4 years
- 5-6 years
- 7-9 years
- 10+ years

Were you an NCAA student-athlete during your own career? *

- Yes
- No

As a student-athlete, did you hold any formal leadership roles? If so, what was your role?

Your answer

Back

Submit

Clear form

Appendix F

Institutional Review Board Approvals

SOUTHEASTERN
UNIVERSITY



NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

DATE: November 28, 2022

TO: Sara Smith, Joshua Henson

FROM: SEU IRB

PROTOCOL TITLE: Does athletic participation develop followership skills? A case study on the Development of followership through athletics.

FUNDING SOURCE: NONE

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 22 NS 05

APPROVAL PERIOD: Approval Date: November 28, 2022 Expiration Date: November 27, 2023

Dear Investigator(s),

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human subjects has reviewed the protocol entitled, *Does athletic participation develop followership skills? A case study on the Development of followership through athletics*. The project has been approved for the procedures and subjects described in the protocol pending the following change:

- 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,

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

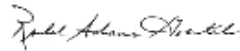


To: Sara Smith
From: Dr. Rachel Adams Goertel, Chair
Date: February 1, 2023
RE: IRB Approval for Research Project Involving Human Subjects
Protocol #: 324-2022
Project: Does athletic participation develop followership skills? A case study on the development of followership through athletics.

The above-referenced human-subjects research project has been approved by the Roberts Wesleyan University Institutional Review Board (RWU IRB). This approval is limited to the activities described in the approved protocol narrative, and extends to the performance of these activities at each site identified in the application for IRB Review. Informed consent must be obtained as indicated. No changes may be made to the study without RWU IRB approval. This approval expires February 28, 2024.

We wish you well in your research efforts!

Sincerely,



Rachel Adams Goertel, Ph.D.
Chair, RWU IRB



Institutional Review Board (IRB) Authorization Agreement

Institution Providing IRB Review:

Name: Southeastern University

IRB Registration #: **IRB00006943**

Federal wide Assurance (FWA)#: 00006943

Institution Relying on the Designated IRB:

Name: Nazareth College

IRB Registration #: IRB00006499

FWA#, if applicable: FWA00013172

The Officials signing below agree that Nazareth College may rely on **Southeastern University** IRB for review and continuing oversight of its human subjects research described below: (check one):

This agreement is limited to the following specific protocol(s):

Name of Research Project: Does athletic participation develop followership skills? A case study on the development of followership through athletics.

Name of Principal Investigator: Sara Smith

Sponsor or Funding Agency: N/A

Award Number, if any: N/A

The review performed by **Southeastern University** IRB will meet the human subject protection requirements of Nazareth College's OHRP-approved FWA. The IRB at **Southeastern University** will follow written procedures for reporting its findings and actions to appropriate officials at Nazareth College. Relevant minutes of IRB meetings will be made available to Nazareth College upon request. Nazareth College remains responsible for ensuring compliance with the IRB's determinations and with the Terms of its OHRP-approved FWA. This document must be kept on file by both parties and provided to OHRP upon request.

Signature of Signatory Official for **Southeastern University**:

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Date: _____