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What Happens Now? Coaching and Leading Following a Student-Athlete Death - A Phenomenological Study

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What Happens Now? Coaching And Leading Following A Student-Athlete Death – A Phenomenological Study

By Peter Joseph McGahey

This Dissertation is Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Educational Doctorate Degree in Educational Leadership

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Abstract

College students die and sometimes these students are student-athletes. This transcendental phenomenological study described and explored the lived leadership experiences, related to the components of Transformational Leadership, of NCAA sports team coaches who led their team following an unexpected death of a student-athlete. No research to date had focused on this leadership phenomenon. Five NCAA sport team head coaches participated in semi-structured interviews to learn more about their coaching leadership experiences during this time of crisis. The study participants shared their intensely emotional and personal leadership experiences of leading and coaching their teams during a time of crisis. There were four main emergent themes with several sub-themes. These were Emotion, Leadership Challenges, Growth as a Leader and University Response and Reaction. Several sub-themes were found to support Bass and Riggio's (2006) four components of the Transformational Leadership theory of Idealized Influence, Individual Consideration, Inspirational Motivation and Intellectual Stimulation. Beyond emergent themes, utilizing Coliazzi's method (1978) of phenomenological analysis, the *essence of experience* of this coaching leadership phenomenon was created. This study confirmed Bass and Riggio's (2006) components of Transformational Leadership theory as a valid framework to examine both crisis leadership and coaching leadership behaviors in sports. This study increased understanding of the phenomenon of sport team coaches leading their teams following the unexpected death of a student-athlete, while providing insights and strategies for coaches and athlete administrators to utilize in the future.

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To Dawn. Well, here we are! Another chapter complete. Thank you for being my ROCK! Thank you seeing it and believing it even before I did! I am looking forward to seeing where our journey goes next! I love you!

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Epoche/Preface

An important part of phenomenological research is for the researcher to acknowledge their experience with the phenomenon being study. Researchers often create an epoche to recognize their experience and begin their bracketing process. The story that follows is offered as both my personal epoche and honest description of the way my research problem presented itself and led to my determination that this would be the direction of my dissertation journey.

My wife and kids were away visiting our friends from our old town. We had just relocated to my new NCAA women's soccer coaching position six months prior. My first preseason game was less than a week away. I had stayed behind to put the final details together and to work on my dissertation on coaching efficacy. The work was not going to be glamorous, but it was going to be positive and productive. I hoped to "move the ball up the field," so to speak. Then the call came.

I ignored the first one. I was too pre-occupied with the weekly calendar and I figured it was probably a mundane question from a player about housing and move-in dates. She would call or text an assistant. But she called back twice in a row. I answered the third call. And my cloud had arrived, but I did not quite know it yet.

"Peter, there has been an accident," the voice said. It was one of my players, who seemed a little stressed, but as a new coach I was glad that she trusted me enough to call me and update me. It was a fender-bender most likely. I quickly and calmly asked, who was driving. It was the required leadership question. She drove a soft-top jeep and I was worried. I had to eliminate the risks. Again, my standard leadership response emerged.

"Christie was driving," she said. I felt immediate relief, though very short-lived. I asked how she was. "Fine," and added that she needed parent contact information for two of our other student-athletes.

I was paying attention now. "Two," she had said. That meant three of our student athletes were in the car. And then I asked the question that changed everything. I asked, "How are Josie and Christie?" "Bad, Peter, it is bad," was the answer and then the critical care nurse got on the phone. I asked again about Josie and Christie. "Critical," was the answer and I was looking for my shoes. My leadership challenge had begun.

I got on the road and on the phone. I started to gather details and notified people who needed to be in the know. Then I spoke with both Josie's and Christie 's parents. We spoke many words and left our fear unspoken. My own fear grew as I spoke to both sets of frightened parents. They each expressed their comfort in knowing that I was on my way to the hospital. I was thinking about my own kids. My soccer family needed me. It was my responsibility to go. So I went.

Then I realized a few things. I did not know what I has facing. I had run out of standard leadership solutions and I was scared. I had no idea what I was getting into. I needed some help; from someone who had been there before. So I reached out to a couple of colleagues. And they picked up the phone and helped. They were there for me. The first told me two things. First, get permission from the parents to be in the student-athlete's hospital room. And second just be there. Check! Those were certainly achievable. The second colleague offered advice as well. The team will need your

strength and love. I can do that. I had a renewed confidence. Thankfully, I was totally unaware at just how hard the challenges ahead were going to be.

Silly to admit but I thought about this dissertation on the way to the hospital. I wondered aloud how it would ever get completed. I was feeling guilty and angry with myself that I had not made more progress. And I was reflecting about leadership. What is it? How can you describe it? Then I decided. I was going to write a one-sentence dissertation about leadership. Leadership is love.

I arrived at the hospital and started to try and locate Josie and Christie. They were not in the ER. Curiously, the ER police officer did not find my nervous humor about my spelling very amusing. Thankfully, the critical care nurse called me just before I was going to misspell Christie's name for the second time in about five minutes. She gave me the room number information for Maddy, Josie and Christie. Yes, all three of our student-athletes had been admitted to the hospital. My visitor nametag in hand, I was headed to the pediatric ICU to see Josie and Christie. Maddy was on a different floor with what turned out to be minor injuries given the circumstances; she would be my second stop. It would be awhile before I saw Maddy.

Up the elevators, I went to the pediatric ICU. I ran into a young doctor as I approached the closed double doors. She asked me if I was the coach. I had my visitor nametag but no coaching hat. I said "yes".

A leader tries to read body language. This helps to understand and appreciate others. As a coach-leader, I spend a great deal of time reading other people's body language. This doctor was sad and she did not tell me anything, but her eyes told me

everything. She gently put her hand on my shoulders. She had worked on Josie since she had arrived. Then she told me what I was going to see on the other side of the doors was going to be very hard. She then clicked her security badge and turned and walked away. I never saw her again. The double doors clicked open. I was standing alone outside the double doors with only one thing to do. I pulled them open for the first of a hundred times and walked inside.

I was greeted with a question. "Are you the coach?" "Yes," I replied. "Okay, come this way". Apparently, permission had been granted. I could be in the rooms. I thought I was going to visit Josie and Christie. My nametag said visitor, but my responsibility was far greater. I was responsible to officially identify both young ladies.

The pediatric ICU had wonderful color and painted murals as decoration. There was a road that wound from room to room. Trees, buildings and smiling people were on the side of the road. Each room had a main theme in the hallway just outside the door. These serve as a little distraction to the challenge of the reality at hand. First, I went to Josie's room, the Michigan Highway patrol room. There were lots of lights on in her room. It was very bright. I confidently identified her as Josie. Everyone's body language was very solemn. No comforting words or hope from the doctor, just a matter of fact summary of her diagnosis: "A serious head injury." Josie was in very critical condition.

Then it was back to the road and around the nurse's station to Christie's room. All I recall about the mural outside Christie 's room was that it was a bridge of some sort. Christie 's room was much different. It was dark. No lights were on and it was quiet. The quiet nature of the room struck me as odd, due to the fact there were seven other people

in addition to Christie. There were doctors, residents, and nurses present. Apparently, it

was a teaching hospital. I was asked to identify her. "Christie," I said confidently.

Nobody moved.   Again, I was reading body language. Something was not quite right.

"This is Christie," I said again and then I mispronounced her last name, four times.

Again, just blank stares from the audience of doctors, residents and nurses. Everyone's

body language was getting a little more rigid. Finally, I said, "This is Christie. I call her

Cheese." That broke the ice. Everyone relaxed. Thankfully, we were on to the diagnosis

from the doctor. The doctor stated, "critical condition with injuries to her head and

lungs." The doctor's tone regarding Christie was different, much different.

The doctor, medical posse and I left Christie 's room. The doctor thanked me and

then gave me some instructions: "Please communicate with the parents only that both

girls are very sick and in critical condition." "No problem," I replied. A few quick

instructions on how to get in and out of the ICU and the doctor was off. She left me

standing at the nurses' station. Now what? I was alone and really did not know what to

do. The situation was clear, two rooms with two critically injured players fighting for

life. I was surrounded by the unfamiliar: doctors, nurses, machines, bells, whistles and a

floor with a road mural. So I began to travel the floor road between the two rooms.

I did not know exactly what else to do. So, I alternatively visited with Josie and Christie.

It was the tale of two rooms. Josie's room was full of light and activity. There were

always multiple nurses and lots of activity. Christie 's room remained the contrast. Her

room was quiet and dark with one critical care nurse and an occasional other person. I

stayed out of the way mostly, but I did talk to both Josie and Christie. I tried to offer them

encouraging and comforting words. I would have wanted my own kids to feel comfort and touch, if they were in similar circumstances. When trying to hold either Josie's and Christie's hands, I was in the way of the medical personnel. Holding their feet I was not in the way. But sadly, just like the lights in the room, there was a big difference in how their feet felt. The cloud of crisis was darkening. This was serious.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Background of Problem

Crisis often arrives without warning and creates challenging circumstances for anyone affected. Crises are marked by time constraints, ambiguity, remarkably unusual circumstances, limited or conflicted information, curious on-lookers and a need for immediate and decisive action (James & Wooten, 2010). Leaders not only have to use all their wisdom to guide their organization through it, they must dig deep inside themselves to find the courage to keep going forward (George, 2009).

Leadership moments happen. These become the times to help, teach and mentor. The challenge comes when these moments arrive in the form of a crisis. Leaders do not go looking for dark clouds, but sometimes they roll in often completely unannounced. In Chinese, the character for crisis is made up of two symbols, danger and opportunity (George, 2009). The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study will be to describe and explore the lived leadership experiences, related to the components of Transformational Leadership, of NCAA sports team coaches who lead their team following an unexpected death of a student-athlete.

Death will visit campus (Collier & Hollis, 2007). An unfortunate reality of young adults is that the majority who die will die violently as a result of accidents, suicides, and homicides (Weathers, 2007). Student deaths are a tragic reality experienced by members of the college community (Owens & Garlough, 2007). Sadly, this became true for our program in the fall of 2013. We lost Josie on August 5th due to injuries

sustained in a single car rollover accident. We experienced the unexpected passing individually and collectively as a program that fall. Tragically, we were not alone in our grief and sadness; because more than 6,000 college students die annually (Iserson, 1999; Weathers, 2007).

Trauma or sudden circumstances often accompany death in college (Nielsen, 2007). Student-athletes are not immune from these realities. For more than a century, athletics has coexisted with institutions of higher education. Among the thousands of college athletic programs across the country are the highly-publicized institutions of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), as well as smaller and less-well known colleges, independent and religious-affiliated institutions, and two-year schools (Norton & Harper, 2007). Student-athletes often play a special and unique role on campus. Athletes are not as unbreakable as they appear; they, too, are vulnerable to the same life-threatening risks and dangers encountered by other college students (Norton & Harper, 2007).

There are few occasions that demand a greater empathic response or are a more solemn endeavor for university professionals than the death of a student (Owens & Garlough, 2007). When student-athletes die, survivors in the university community are often left confused by the loss. They attempt to gain control of a seemingly uncontrollable situation by asking themselves unanswerable questions (Norton & Harper, 2007). For sports teams, the coach will be looked to provide answers and guidance to the team and community.

On a college campus coaches, faculty and staff assume many roles inside and outside the classroom, including on the field or court. In the opinions of Norton and Harper (2007), nowhere is the notion of *in loco parentis* more evident than the college campus, and nowhere on the campus is it more apparent than in athletics. A coach is often looked at as the de facto parent for their student-athletes. Everyone in athletics has some level of *in loco parentis* responsibility. In the eyes of the parents, the crux of supervision is often placed on the coaching staff (Norton & Harper, 2007). Parents expect athletics staff members (namely coaches) to ensure their children's safety, protect them from harm, and most importantly help sustain their lives (Norton & Harper, 2007). When student-athletes die, coaches may feel a heightened level of responsibility to their players, community and the deceased student athlete's family.

Student deaths are often unpredictable and uncontrollable, even those situations we see so clearly in hindsight (Norton & Harper, 2007). In times of loss, survivors must, and do, endure. Parents lose a child, and they grieve. A piece of the team is missing, but teammates continue to put forth the effort expected of them (Norton & Harper, 2007). Coaches must continue to lead and guide their teams. Life and seasons go on.

When Josie passed away, I had been coaching my team for less than eight months. The challenge of leading following a student-athlete death was never addressed in any of my professional training nor had I anticipated having to deal with it as college coach. Colleagues offered some anecdotal advice and the readily available literature offered little guidance. For me, there were often powerful feelings of uncertainty and worry. I was left to draw only from my personal and previous professional experiences. As a

NCAA Division I sport-team head coach, I was responsible with guiding our student-athletes through this tragic time while moving the program forward.

Groups and organizations experience stress when confronted with threats to their steady states of wellbeing (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Janis & Mann, 1997). In stressful times, individuals are suddenly challenged to deal with their emotions, understand and appreciate a new set of circumstances and to learn new behaviors. In a crisis, the outcome is rarely predictable. A sports team's wellbeing is often turned upside down with the death of team member.

Given these pressures, the demands of a leader in a crisis can be unique and require a different set of abilities than what would typically be expected during general leadership (James & Wooten, 2010). The leadership experiences of a coach leading their team following a student-athlete death warrant further investigation. Other student-athletes will die. Other families will lose a son or daughter. Other college campus' will be left to pick up the pieces. The cycle of life and death is inevitable (Norton & Harper, 2007).

Problem Statement

A gap in the research literature appears to exist as it relates to examining actual leadership experiences of sport team coaches following the unexpected death of a student-athlete leading during in sport team coaching. A study examining the leadership experiences, related to the components of transformational leadership, of NCAA sport team coaches who have lead their teams following the unexpected death of a student-

athlete could enhance the scholarly literature in the field of transformational leadership, sport leadership, and crisis leadership.

There is little formal education or training and, until recently, research on how to lead under the extraordinarily pressure-filled times that crisis creates (James & Wooten, 2010). For those who do, leading through the crisis of an unexpected student-athlete death may be a life-changing phenomenon. Their stories are worthy of sharing for their own sake. In particular, phenomenological analysis of them is especially beneficial for the leadership lessons they could provide for coaches and athletic department leaders everywhere.

To be effective in crisis conditions, leaders must be transformational – able to rise above what their followers see as their immediate needs and appropriate reactions (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Bass and Riggio have shown that transformational leadership behaviors can be effective during a crisis. There appears to be a growing interest in researching transformational leadership within the sports and athletics field. Deepening the understanding and connection between sport team coaching and transformational leadership during a crisis is of particular relevance to both this dissertation and my professional life as a NCAA Division I Head Coach, because college students die and sometimes these college students are athletes.

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this phenomenological study will be to describe and explore the lived leadership experiences, related to the components of transformational leadership, of NCAA sports team coaches who have led their teams following an unexpected death of a

student-athlete. For the purposes of this study, leadership experience will be generally defined as the attitudes, beliefs and actions of the NCAA sports team coaches. Below are the specific research questions that will guide the study.

Primary Research Questions

- How do NCAA Division I or Division II sport team coaches describe the experience of leading their team in the competitive season following a student-athlete death?

- In what ways, if any, do NCAA Division I or Division II sport-team coaches' descriptions of their leadership approaches, beliefs and actions while leading their teams following the unexpected death of a student-athlete correlate to established components of Transformational Leadership?

Significance of the Study

The purpose of the research will be to gain a deeper understanding of the experience of a coach leading a team following the unexpected death of a student-athlete. Through this research process, participants may gain a deeper understanding of their own leadership experiences and potentially feel more connected with others who share a similar experience. The results of this study could potentially help other coaches and intercollegiate leaders in the future. When faced with the unexpected death of a student-athlete, coaches and intercollegiate leaders may be able to draw on and reference the experiences of others who have lived the phenomenon.

Study Delimitations

This study was limited to a maximum of six NCAA Division I or Division II sport team head coaches who experienced leading the team in the season following the unexpected death of a student-athlete. The number of research participants was limited due both practical and literature-based rationale. Both Polkinghorne (1989) and Creswell (2013) recommend interviewing between 5 to 25 individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon. Smith and Osborn (2007) and Parks (2013) further supported this idea as they explain recent trends in phenomenological analysis to use a very small number of participants. A small sample size will allow for identification of a closely defined group (Smith et al., 2009). No current database of NCAA coaches who had led their team following an unexpected death of a student-athlete could be identified; therefore, coaches had to be identified through media stories. Given the sensitive and personal nature of this phenomenon, identifying participants to voluntarily share their experiences posed challenges. These factors contributed to the time constraints for completion of this dissertation study.

This study was limited to NCAA Division I or Division II sport team head coaches who experienced leading the team in the season following the unexpected death of a student-athlete. For the purposes of a phenomenological study, it is critical that all the research participants share a common experience. Selecting individuals who have this shared leadership experience will limit the number of research participants. As it is essential for a phenomenological study that all participants share the experience to be studied, the following five criteria were utilized for participant selection.

Participants must have been a NCAA Division I or Division II intercollegiate sport-team head coach during the season following an unexpected death of a student-athlete. Intercollegiate sport-team head coaches were selected due to the leadership position within their team and their ability to influence their athletes and teams. The NCAA Division I or Division II level were selected due to presence of athletic scholarships. Athletic scholarship creates dynamics regarding student-athlete participation and expected performance levels within intercollegiate teams. NCAA Division I and Division II coaches are expected to have teams compete successfully and win games or competitions. Student-athletes are expected to compete and perform to the desired level of coaches and the University.

At least one calendar year must have passed since the completion of the team's season following the student-athlete death. This passage of time will allow coaches to reflect back on their experience of leading their team following the unexpected death of a student-athlete. Given this parameter, a period of reflection and healing may have occurred for the research participants. The recollection of actual feelings and behaviors may be blended with 'what I could've and should've done' thoughts and reflections. Asking what and how questions, in the phenomenological research tradition, should allow research participants to share their recollections about their actual leadership experience.

Sport-team both male and female head coaches who are coaching sport teams of both genders were identified and selected. Coaching intercollegiate men and women's teams can possess different challenges. Selection in this manner will attempt to ensure

appropriate gender representation regarding leadership experiences. Though different team sports may require different types of leadership behaviors, no sports were eliminated from consideration for this study. Including all sports was necessary, given that this was the first study to examine this phenomenon.

No participating coach or their athlete or athletes who passed away were directly coached with or been coached directly by the researcher. Unlike quantitative research, which values objectivity, phenomenology demands a personal investment into the topic being studied (Dorney, 2014; Sarter, 1988). Given my experience with this phenomenon, efforts such as these criteria, writing my Epoche, and journaling were used in an effort to help reduce the risk of researcher bias.

Definition of Key Terms

Crisis. For the purpose of this study crisis will be defined broadly as both a disruption that physically impacts an entire system and threatens its basic and core missions (Parks, 2013; Pauchant & Mitroff, 1992) and refers to a situation facing an organization, which requires that, the organization, under time constraints, to engage in new, untested, unlearned behaviors in order to obtain or maintain its desired goal states (Krackhardt & Stern, 1988).

Crisis leadership. For the purposes of this study, crisis leadership will be defined as those actions an individual takes in a leadership role following the unexpected death of a student-athlete.

Leadership experience. For the purpose of this study, leadership experience will be defined as the attitudes, beliefs and actions of the NCAA sports team coaches.

Student-athlete. For the purposes of this study, student-athlete will be defined as a current and active member of an NCAA DI or DII sport-team roster.

Sports team coaching. For the purposes of this study, sport team coaching will be defined as actions, attitudes and beliefs that strive to equip each athlete individually and team collectively with skills, strategies, behaviors, and values that would build each individual into a champion on and off the court or field (Vallée & Bloom, 2005).

Transformational leadership. For the purposes of this study, transformational leadership will be defined generally as leadership behaviors that [strive to] stimulate and inspire followers and teams to both achieve extraordinary outcomes and, in the process, develop their own leadership capacity (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Often times it is in the most trying of circumstances where the strongest of character can be forged. It is not in the confines and safety of amazing circumstances where character is forged, it is during the exhausting, and painful times (Gilbert & Medcalf, 2015). Josie was keeping a journal when the car accident happened. The journal and a book she was reading were found by her teammates during the clean out of the car. The book was Harold Kushner's (1981) *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. Most 19 year olds are not reading this powerful of book over the summer. Her journal was as equally as powerful for everyone. It contained her private reflections and insight into her last critical thoughts, as she amazingly contemplated the mystery of life and death. Her journal had a quote of the day. Her quote of the day left us all with a question. "What would you do if you weren't afraid?"

Legend has it that dissertation Literature Reviews are challenging. My struggle has been no different. Facing the reality of reflecting back into a very emotional and difficult time in my life has presented more than a few struggles. As time has past however, the true struggle became clearer. I've been afraid. Real fear arose of truly engaging the dissertation writing process. Interestingly, the question and answer to begin my writing journey was the same as it was during that fateful fall of 2013. What would you do if you weren't afraid?

Researchers have argued that a search for one universal leadership definition was pointless. Research tends to point more toward a philosophy of leadership. John

Maxwell (1993) has defined leadership as influence. This philosophy fits for me both as a leader and as a researcher. Influence can be either positive or negative in terms of intent, interactions and outcomes. The existence of positive or negative possibilities for me speaks to the power and responsibilities of leadership.

It was important for me as a researcher to find a leadership theory that was inherently positive. This positively focused leadership theory had to be broad enough to study and describe a range of behaviors that could include coaching and coaching following the death of player. Leadership is not a one-size fits all approach. And finally, it was important to find a leadership theory and research area could be taught and developed (Charbonneau, Barling, & Kelloway, 2001). This fits my belief as a leader and researcher that leadership is a learned skill and can be developed. This creates an opportunity for future growth both as leader and as a researcher with the mission and opportunity to help others. *Transformational Leadership* and the *Full Range Leadership Model* are two related models that appear to meet this complex array of requirements. These models, then, serve as the foci of this literature review. Discussions of their philosophies and principals will be followed by overviews of primary research that has substantiated their theoretical foundations.

Philosophy of Leadership Conducive to Coaching

Components of Transformational Leadership

Over the past 30 years, Transformational Leadership has been among the most studied and debated ideas within the field of leadership (McClesky, 2014; Diaz-Saenz, 2011). According to Bass and Riggio (2006), transformational leadership has shown to

be effective in a wide range of settings. These settings for performance effectiveness range from military, US and international business, education, private sector, politics, government, health care, and athletics. Transformational Leadership, when considered and implemented as a part of the Full Range Leadership model developed by Bass and Avolio (1990), provides a meaningful paradigm for effective leaders and coaches to adopt. The Full Range Leadership Model is probably the most researched and validated leadership model in worldwide use today (Kirkbride, 2006).

Transformational leaders are those who stimulate and inspire followers to both achieve extraordinary outcomes and, in the process, develop their own leadership capacity (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transformational leadership is viewed as an ability of a leader to elevate the interest of his/her followers and to foster their commitment and energy toward the group and its goals (Bass, 1990; O'Boyle, Murray & Cummins, 2015).

Transformational leaders help followers grow and develop into leaders by responding to individual follower's needs. They do so by empowering them and by aligning the objectives and goals of the individual follower, the leader, the group, and the larger organization (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Coaching is a wonderful and fulfilling profession. Coaching is leadership that is filled with people who are building relationships, struggling together, growing together, facing adversity together and alone, and striving for learning and improvement. Evidence indicates that transformational leadership can move followers to exceed expected performance, and lead to high levels of follower satisfaction and commitment to the group and organization (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Transformation leadership, however, raises leadership to the next level; beyond team rules and policies developed by the coach and handed over to team with the expectation of compliance. Transformational leaders motivate others to do more than they originally intended and often even more that they thought possible (Bass & Riggio, 2006). In their study *Building a Successful University Program: Key and Common Elements of Expert Coaches,* Vallée and Bloom (2005) described that each coach's strategy was to develop the players into great athletes, as well as great people. Transformational leadership involves inspiring followers to commit to a shared vision and goals for an organization or unit, challenging them to be innovative problem solvers, and developing followers' leadership capacity via coaching, mentoring, and provision of both challenge and support (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Transformational leaders communicate a collective vision and inspire followers to look beyond their self-interests for the good of the group (Tucker, Barling, Olga, Butcher, & Milner, 2002). A coach who moves their leadership and coaching behaviors beyond X's and O's and rules are attempting to transform their teams and players. Transformational leaders do more with colleagues and followers than set-up simple exchanges or agreements (Bass & Riggio, 2006).   In their research on coaching leadership, Vallée and Bloom (2005) concluded that expert coaches equip their athletes with skills, strategies, behaviors, and values that would potentially build each individual into a champion on and off the court. Vallée and Bloom further found that the expert coaches aimed at developing each player into a higher-level athlete, instilling intrinsic

motivation to maximize their potential. They set more challenging expectations and typically achieved higher performances.

Transformational leaders also tend to have more committed and satisfied followers. Moreover, transformational leaders empower followers and pay attention to their individual needs and personal development, helping followers to develop their own leadership potential (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transformational leadership is about coming alongside the developing person, encouraging failure, offering immediate feedback and support, and naming this part of the journey as THE path to growth and mastery (Gilbert & Medcalf, 2015).

Transformational leadership is about transforming followers' motivation toward their work: instead of focusing on self-centered and extrinsic motives, they are guided toward higher ordered and intrinsic goals (Borman, Schulte-Coerne, Diebig & Rowold, 2016). This type of leadership would appear to parallel coaching leadership. A coach is driven to help their players to be motivated to pour their efforts into the benefit of the team. Transformational leadership focuses on the transformation of followers' needs toward higher ordered and team-oriented motives (Bass, 1985).

Coaches are clearly role models for their teams. They strive to model behavior and attitudes that form foundations for a positive team process. Coaches must walk the talk. Transformational leaders behave in ways that allow them to serve as role models for their followers (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Players tend to emulate their coaches' attitudes and actions. Followers often endow their leaders as having extraordinary capabilities (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Bass and Riggio (2006) identified four main components to

transformational leadership, sometimes referred to as the Four I's: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. These components are explained in the following paragraphs.

    Idealized influence. The first component of Transformational Leadership is Idealized Influence (II). There are two main aspects to idealized influence; the leader's behavior and the elements that are attributed to the leader by followers and other associates (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

    Leaders who have a great deal of idealized influence are willing to take risks and are consistent rather than arbitrary (Bass & Riggio, 2006). One of the challenges of coaching and leading a team is the need to be both consistent and to take risks. The balancing act can be demonstrated both on the field during the game and off the field in culture creation. Leaders do the right thing, at the right time and for the right reason. Coaching leaders lead with integrity.

    Moving a team forward in a positive direction and aiding an individual reaching new levels of personal growth calls for intrinsic motivation. A coach needs to motivate their team and team members. Transformational leaders behave in ways that motivate and inspiring those around them by providing meaning and challenge to their followers' work (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

    Inspirational motivation. The second component of Transformational Leadership is Inspirational Motivation (IM). Enthusiasm and optimism are displayed (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Coaches involve team members in envisioning and helping to create a positive vision and mission for the program. The required development process

and team expectations are also shared and created. Idealized influence leadership and inspirational motivation are similar to the charismatic-inspirational factor in charismatic leadership theory (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Intellectual stimulation. The third component of Transformational Leadership is Intellectual Stimulation (IS). Getting a team and individual to develop involves helping them move outside their comfort zone. Moving people and a team to new levels of achievement calls for creative solutions and new approaches. The same old process over and over does not lead to new outcomes. As in many professional contexts, successful coaches are those who can adapt their behavior to meet the demands of their particular working environment (Nash, Sproule & Horton, 2011). Transformational leaders encourage creativity, reframe adversity and seek new solutions. Followers are encouraged to try new approaches, and their ideas aren't criticized because they differ from the leaders (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Individual consideration. The fourth component, and final component, of Transformational Leadership is Individual Consideration (IC). Coaches are responsible for both the development of entire team and each individual team member's development. A major area of focus for a coach is helping each individual player reach his or her potential. Transformational leaders pay special attention to each individual follower's needs for achievement and growth by acting as a coach or mentor (Bass & Riggio, 2006). A team is made up of unique individuals. Transformational leaders embrace this individuality and its importance to the team. The leader's behaviors demonstrate acceptance of individual differences (e.g. some employees receive more

encouragement, some more autonomy, others firmer standards, and still others more task structure) (Bass & Riggio, 2006). John Wooden, described by Wooden and Jamison (2005) as one of the greatest coaches of all time, believed in treating everyone fairly but not equally.

Coaches who subscribe to this component lead everyone as an individual. Transformational leaders see individuals as a complete person not just an athlete or a team member. An open dialogue between the coach and player is developed. This includes active listening and regular monitoring to access both developmental progress and required future guidance. Individual growth referred to the overall philosophy of personal development that coaches promoted as part of their successful programs (Vallée & Bloom, 2005). The authentic transformational leader is truly concerned with the desires and needs of followers and cares about their individual development (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Full Range Leadership: Transformational and Transactional

Bass's Transformational Leadership falls into a larger model of leadership developed by Avolio and Bass (1991). Their Full Range of Leadership (FRL) model (Figure 1) provides a continuum of analysis for potential Transactional and Transformational leadership behaviors and actions. Fundamental to the FRL model is that leaders display each leadership behavior to some amount (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The analysis spectrum in the figure provides opportunity to rate passivity vs. activity and effectiveness vs. ineffectiveness of leadership behaviors and actions.
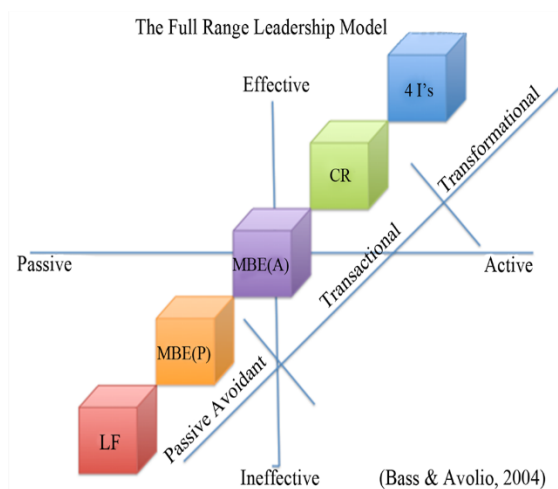
Figure 1. The Full Range Leadership model illustrates a continuum of potential leadership behaviors. LF = Laissez-Faire Leadership, MBE (P) = Management by exception – passive, MBE (A) = Management by Exception – active, CR = Contingent Reward, 4 I's = Individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation and idealized influence.

The research has shown an impact on leadership effectiveness and transformational leadership behaviors and actions. Leaders are generally most effective when they regularly use each of the four transformational behaviors (individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation and idealized influence) to build on contingent rewards (Barbuto & Cummins-Brown, 2007). There is nothing wrong with transactional leadership. It can, in most instances, be effective (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Coaches can and do succeed with transactional leadership behaviors.

Some coaches treat their players as pawns in the coach's quest for victories and self-promotion. Utilizing primarily transactional leadership with the aim being short-term results can come at a cost for teams and certainly individual players. Transactional leaders can often get quick results, but often those are at the cost of relationships and in their wake they leave crushed spirits, hopes, and dreams (Gilbert & Medcalf, 2015). Bass

(1985), proposed an augmentation relationship between transformational leadership and transactional leadership. He suggested that transformational leadership augments transactional in predicting effects on follower satisfaction and performance (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Transactional leadership alone provides a questionable basis for effective leadership, but a greater amount of effort, effectiveness, and satisfaction is possible from transactional leadership if enhanced by transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The nuances of transactional leadership will be presented through the following discussions of three main transactional behaviors of the Full Range Leadership model (FRL): contingent reward, management by exception (passive and active), and laissez-faire.

Contingent reward leadership. Barbuto and Cummins-Brown (2007) describe the contingent rewards level of the FRL as the once popular game show, Let's Make a Deal. Transactional leadership occurs when the leader rewards or disciplines the follower, depending on the adequacy of the follower's performance (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Contingent Reward (CR) leadership involves the leader assigning or obtaining followers agreement on what needs to be done with the promise of actual rewards offered in exchange for satisfactorily carrying out the assignment (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transactional leadership identifies the leader as the catalyst for follower expectations, goals and the provision of recognition and rewards when a task is completed (Bass, 1985; O'Boyle et al., 2015). Contingent reward leadership could involve providing financial rewards or awards that are of material importance to the follower.

Professional sport and potentially high-level Division I sport are evidence that contingent reward leadership may be effective; given the pursuit of external monetary awards or athletic participation and efforts in exchange for athletic scholarship (O'Boyle et al., 2015). Any place where a defined behavior is performed in exchange for a perceived reward could be described as transactional exchange between coach and player. Another area within sport, for contingent reward leadership could include the rewards of playing time and a role on the team in exchange for successful game plan execution or adherence to team rules and standards. Nevertheless, other models of leadership in sport tend to operate at higher levels of human needs (e.g. social belonging, self-actualization) such as the transformational approach that seems to be more effective in providing long-term and sustainable leadership results (O'Boyle et al., 2015).

Management-by-exception. Within the FRL model leadership transactional leadership behaviors move along a continuum from more positive Contingent Rewards to more negative and passive forms of Management-by-Exception (MBE) (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Management-by-exception is a corrective form of transactional leadership behavior. Leaders, who utilize management-by-exception, appear to be watching and waiting for errors or mistakes to occur. Barbuto and Cummins-Brown (2007) describe management-by-exception as putting out fires and only hearing from the leader when something is wrong.

Within management-by-exception, the leadership corrective action may be either active (MBE-A) or passive (MBE-P). With MBE - A, the leader actively monitors the followers' behaviors while waiting for deviances and errors from established norms in

order to take correct actions (Bass & Riggio, 2006). MBE-A may be required and effective in some situations, such as when safety is paramount in importance (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

According to Bass and Riggio (2006), MBE-P may be practiced when directly supervising a large number of people. The passive nature of MBE-P implies that the leader is not actively engaged in followers' behavior (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The leader, utilizing MBE-P behavior, likely takes no action until complaints are received or problems reported. Then once aware of a deviance or error has occurred, the leader offers corrective action. Transactional leaders, particularly those who rely on management-by-exception, who emphasize reactive corrective actions, may actually increase stress in their followers (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Laissez-faire leadership. The final leadership behavior within the FRL is Laissez-Faire Leadership (LF). Similar to MBE-P, Laissez-Faire Leadership makes up Passive Avoidant behaviors in which the leader takes no action until it is too late (Daft, 2008).   As opposed to transactional leadership, laissez-faire leadership represents a non-transaction (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Leaders appear to avoid getting involved.

Laissez-faire leadership can be described as either the complete absence or avoidance of leadership. According to Barbuto and Cummins-Brown (2007), laissez-faire leadership can be described as hands-off leadership with leaders avoiding taking a stand. Bass and Riggio (2006) define laissez-faire leadership as the most inactive and ineffective style. Leadership behaviors are completely inactive and leaders avoid getting involved when important issues arise. According to Bass and Riggio, necessary decisions

are not made and actions are often delayed. Leaders ignore the responsibilities of leadership.

Research in Sports and Coaching

Transformational Leadership and Sport

Sport can provide an excellent domain in which to research leaders and areas of leadership. In team sports, a coach is responsible for all members of a team, not just a single person (Borman, Schulte-Coerne, Diebig & Rowold, 2016). This may be because sport performance (successes and failures) are accurately measurable, sports teams provide a neat sample size that can provide both scope and depth of investigation, and leadership behaviors are critical and widely relied upon within sport at every level (O'Boyle et al., 2015). Research on coaching behaviors, emerged over 30 years ago with a specific focus on coach-athlete interactions within sports participation, and subsequent athletic psychosocial development and past studies investigated coaching behaviors and the frequency and timing of coaching behaviors mainly through observational methods; delivering instruction, punishment and praise (O'Boyle et al., 2015).

At its core, transformational leadership with all its facets is about transforming followers' motivation toward striving for excellence (Bass, 1985; Borman et al., 2016). Transformational leadership is a form of leadership that occurs when leaders broaden and enlarge the interest of those whom they lead; act morally; motivate their followers to go beyond individual self-interest for the good of the group; and address and engage each individual follower in true commitment (Vella, Oades & Crowe, 2013). Coaches who engage in transformational leadership behaviors should make a positive impact on

individual outcomes, such as perceived sport competence, affective reactions, and intrinsic motivation as well and group outcomes, such as team cohesion and collective efficacy (Price & Weiss, 2013).

Though, transformational leadership has shown to be effective across a board range of fields, it appears to be a continuing and emerging area of research within coaching and sport. In their study utilizing Chelladurai's Multidimensional Model of Leadership to examine building successful University sports programs, Vallée and Bloom (2005) found an unexpected connection to the transformational leadership style. They encouraged further examination of transformational leadership and coaching. "We are hopeful that this study is a starting point in linking and applying the transformational leadership style to the field of coaching" (Vallée & Bloom, 2005, p. 194). Despite this call, to date an examination of the transformational leadership and coaching literature shows the links continue in their early stages. More specifically, while transformational and transactional leadership styles have been explored in various settings, their application to the field of sports has been very limited (Rowold, 2006).

Motivation and Performance

Danielle Charbonneau, Julian Barling & E. Kevin Kelloway in their 2001 study *Transformational Leadership and Sports Performance: The Mediating Role of Intrinsic Motivation* examined university athletes' perceptions of their coach's transformational leadership and their own during the season. They were the first researchers to begin to link transformational leadership to sports (Vella et al., 2012). Transformational leadership displays certain characteristics that impact follower's perceptions and potential

actions. Charbonneau et al. (2001) believed that the utility of the transformational leadership model could be enhanced if shown to be valid in the sports context. Additional researchers have expressed concern that scales developed for industry and business areas are not necessarily relevant to sports contexts because of the time-limited nature for athletic teams, the win-lose dichotomy, and the amount of time required to train for competitions (Charbonneau et al., 2001; Zhang, Jensen & Mann, 1997).

In the results of their study, Charbonneau et al. (2001) extended the understanding of transformational leadership. Strong support was found for the proposed model in which intrinsic motivation mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and performance. The degree of a coach's transformational leadership behavior has been shown to predict athlete performance, task and social cohesion, and intrinsic motivation (Charbonneau et al., 2001; Vella et al., 2013). Coaching self-motivated athletes would be a critical factor within sports. Charbonneau et al. (2001) were surprised to find the smaller relative contribution of charisma to intrinsic motivation, in comparison to other transformational leadership areas. It is possible that on sports teams, athletes already have the purpose of winning and do not benefit as much from a leader's vision as would organizational teams, for whom the purpose and vision need some clarification (Charbonneau et al., 2001).

In the study of *Transformational and Transactional Leadership in Martial Arts*, Jens Rowold (2006) examined the leadership behaviors of sports coaches while examining the factorial validity of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire and explored that transformational leadership behavior of sport coaches should be studied.

Transformational leadership has proven itself valid in a variety of organizational

contexts. In sport, results and motivation are important. Given that transformational

leadership has been found to be closely associated with outcome criteria such as

followers' performance and motivation, it seems valuable to learn more about the effects

of this approach in the sports domain (Rowold, 2006). Rowold proposed that

transformational leadership styles are significantly and positively related to coaching

effectiveness. The results of his study provided further support for the universality of the

transformational and transactional leadership paradigm as it relates to sports coached

leadership behavior (Rowold, 2006). Future researchers continue to build on Rowold's

work.

Athletes look to coaches and peer leaders for different types of information and

leadership. In their study *Relationships Among Coach Leadership, Peer Leadership, and*

Adolescent Athletes' Psychosocial and Team Outcomes: A Test of Transformational

Leadership Theory, Price and Weiss (2013) utilized transformational leadership theory as

a framework to examine the relationship of coach and peer leadership with individual and

team outcomes among of female adolescent soccer players. Horn (2008) and Price and

Weiss (2013) stated that transformational leadership theory provides a viable framework

for investigating relationships between coaching behaviors and athlete outcomes.

Transformational leadership has shown positive effects on followers' motivations,

commitment, satisfaction, and other outcomes, and can be applied to many domains

including sports (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Price & Weiss, 2013; Weese, 1994).

Within a team, leadership is happening on multiple levels and layers. Coaches are not the only source of leadership on sport teams – athletes are also essential leaders (Price & Weiss, 2013). There is clearly leadership influence from coach to player, player to coach, player to player and player to themselves. Coaches and peer leaders who used the 4I's (individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation and idealized influence) and contingent-rewarding behaviors were associated with positive individual and team outcomes (Price & Weiss, 2013).

Price and Weiss (2013) found results consistent with transformational leadership theory in that peer and/or coach behaviors were positively related to perceived competence, intrinsic motivation, enjoyment, team cohesion and confidence. Transformational leaders are thought to enhance individual's self-confidence, effort, and empowerment as well as teams' unity, cooperation and confidence (Bass, 2008; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Price & Weiss, 2013). Peer leadership working in conjunction with coaching leadership plays an important role in contributing to team outcomes.

Athletes seek different types of leadership from their coaches and peers. Price and Weiss (2013) suggested that team members may look to coaches for information about physical ability, future team success and goal attainment, and feelings of joy associated with playing, where as they look to peer leaders for guidance toward achieving group-oriented instrumental and social goals. This means that a combination of coach and peer transformational leadership behaviors were associated with athletes who saw their teams as close-knit, efficient at achieving goals, and confident about future success. Coaches who engage in transformational leadership behaviors should make a positive

impact on individual outcomes, such perceived sport competence, affective reactions, and intrinsic motivation as well as group outcomes (Price & Weiss, 2013).

Vella et al. (2012) further examined The Differentiated Transformational Leadership Inventory in their study *Coach Leadership in Youth Soccer*. They found that coaches' transformational leadership behavior increased intrinsic motivation; which in turn led to increased sporting performance (Vella et al., 2012). Transformational leadership behavior is also directly linked to an athlete's efforts at training and frequency of training, as well as satisfaction with the coach and perception of the coach's effectiveness (Rowold, 2006; Vella et al., 2012). A coach's transformational leadership behavior is the core element in the holistic development of athlete and the building of successful University sporting programs (Vallée & Bloom, 2005; Vella et al., 2012).

Vella et al. (2012) found the Differentiated Transformational Leadership Inventory to be a valid reach tool within the context of youth sport. Measures of coach leadership will necessarily lose some element of meaning if they do not take into account both the individual and wider team dynamics aspect of coaching, making this a strength of the transformational leader model in sports coaching. The results of the study showed the high performance expectations are not compatible with the understanding of transformational leadership in youth sports. Context appears to be a critical element of understanding transformational leadership in the sports setting.

Situational Context

Sport-oriented leadership research also attests important situational and contextual influences. Depending on the level of competition, the potential of different leadership

behaviors vary (Borman, Schulte-Coerne, Diebig & Rowold, 2016; Callow, Smith, Hardy, Arthur & Hardy, 2009). In their study, *Measurement of Transformational Leadership and its Relationship with Team Cohesion and Performance*, Callow et al. (2009) examined the construct validity of a Differentiated Transformational Leadership Inventory and its relationship with team cohesion and performance level of United Kingdom ultimate Frisbee players. The Differentiated Transformational Leadership Inventory was developed for the military setting. The researchers were looking to expand on the research and increase an understanding of transformational leadership. They were examining previously designed research tools to test validity in the sport setting and to take into account group dynamic variables such as cohesion when studying transformational leadership.

The research by Callow et al. (2009) offered preliminary support for the factorial validity of the Differentiated Transformational Leadership Inventory in the sport setting. Results from their study showed that future research needs to consider the context of the leadership setting. These results support the notion that different leadership behaviors are not only used differentially, but their relative influence might vary in different contexts, and as such the results provide justification that future research needs to examine the effect of contextual influences on both transformational and transactional leadership**.** Contexts for a sports team could be setting, circumstance or even expectations. Callow et al. (2009) expanded this context further by stating the fact that high performance expectations, inspirational motivation, and appropriate role model significantly discriminated between high and low performance groups whereas the other leadership

behaviors did not demonstrate the unique contributions that these specific leadership behaviors could make to performance.

Borman et al. (2016) stated that transformational leadership theory is continuing to gain increased attention in recent years in the sport domain. The researchers examined coaches' transformational leadership on player performance. In their 2016 study, *Athlete Characteristics and Team Competitive Performance as Moderators for the Relationship Between Coach Transformational Leadership and Athlete Performance*, they examined the impact of transformational leadership on individual and team performance and looked for joint moderating effects of players' win orientation and teams' competitive performance. It is expected that transformational leadership behaviors do foster individual- and team-level positive performance in sports (Borman et al., 2016; Callow et al., 2009).

Team sport coaches are responsible for all members of a team, not just a single person (Borman et al., 2016). Team coaches are responsible for impacting both the individual's performance and the collective performance of the team. Transformational leadership focuses on the transformation of follower's needs toward higher ordered and teammate oriented motives (Bass, 1985; Borman et al., 2016). Transformational leadership empowers follower's to pursue excellence.

Borman et al., (2016) suggested moving beyond studying the simple effects of leadership and focus on personal and environmental-related factors. Depending on the level of competition, the potential of different leadership behavior varies (Borman et al., 2016; Callow et al., 2009). The internal characteristics within each individual at a given

level of play may impact the effectiveness of transformational leadership. We expect followers who are strongly inclined toward (team) success, that is, those who are highly win oriented to be more inspired and to be more willing to exert extra effort than those who put less focus on success (Borman et al., 2016; Martin & Gill, 1991). Transformational leadership is about transforming follower's motivation toward their work: instead of focusing on self-centered and extrinsic motivation, they are guided toward high ordered and intrinsic goals (Borman et al., 2016).

Over the course of their study, Borman et al. (2016) found that transformational leadership's impact on individual's performance is dependent upon the fit between player's motivation for winning and actual team performance. Transformational coaches provide players with autonomy and promote their self-efficacy, which should result in superior performance (Borman et al., 2016; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Moorman, & Fetter, 1990). Transformational leadership must fit the situation and the motivations of the player, particularly as it relates to winning and team performance. Transformational leadership is not the golden key to be imposed on any leadership setting per se when it goes to individual performance (Borman et al., 2016). In situations of misfit between players' motivations for winning and performance of the respective team, transformational leadership turns out to be unrelated to performance.

Sports-oriented leadership research stresses the importance of environmental contingencies (Borman et al., 2016). Leaders need situational awareness. According to Borman et al. (2016), this awareness is important when leading through role modeling and challenging athletes to scrutinize routines. Several studies showed that

transformational leadership is a statistically significant predictor of athlete attitudes and behaviors in the sports setting (Charbonneau et al., 2001; Rowold, 2006). Leadership impact depends on both the situation and on the athlete. Building on Callow's et al. (2009) call to consider context when studying transformational leadership, situational awareness suggests moving beyond just the effects of leadership behavior to focus on other factors. The unexpected death of a student-athlete could be one of these situational factors.

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College Student Death – A Crisis

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College Student Death

Death is a hidden reality on college campus (Dorney, 2014). College students die. Many faculty, administrators, and students do not anticipate the sudden death of a student or classmate; however it is estimated that approximately 30 to 40 percent of college students experience the death of a family member or friend within two years on campus (Dorney, 2014). According to Balk (2011), college campuses annually witness numerous encounters with death. On average, for every campus, at least four students die each year; in some cases, there have been annual incidence rates as high as 15 student deaths (Balk, 2011). According to Iserson (1999) and Weathers (2007), approximately 6,000 college students die annually.

The publications of numerous works on the topic of student deaths over time provide evidence of the extent and need for further examination. Professor Shneidman of Harvard in 1972 published the first book on college student death, *Death and the College Student*. It was a collection of student essays on death and dying (Cintrón et al., 2007).

Coping with Death on Campus edited by Ellen Zinner was published in 1985 as part of a series on New Direction for Student Services (Dorney, 2014). Heather L. Servaty-Seib and Deborah J. Taub (2008) published *Assisting Bereaved College Students: New Directions for Student Services*. Rose Cintrón, Erin Taylor Weathers, and Katherine Garlough (2007) published *College Student Death; Guidance for a Caring Campus*. These books provide more practical guides and perspectives than theoretical research related to college student death. Additionally, David Balk (2011) published an e-book *Helping the Bereaved College Student* offering a textbook for understanding and supporting a bereaved college community (Dorney, 2014).

Crisis of College Student Death

In his 2013 dissertation *Educational Leadership Growth Through Dealing with a Major Crisis Event: A Phenomenological Study*, Parks (2013) studied the leadership growth and development of principals in the state of Massachusetts who had experienced a major school crisis. According to Coombs (2004) and Parks (2013), crises are largely sudden and negative. Coombs (2002) and Parks (2013) stated crises should be categorized under two different threads. First, crisis situations have the potential to cause great disruption to daily operations impeding the ability of the organization to function properly. Second, mishandling a crisis could damage the organization's reputation.

A crisis event is a major event with tremendous potential negative outcomes that may affect an organization and all its constituents, along with causing long-term reputational damage (Fearn-Banks, 1996; Parks, 2013). Pauchant and Mitroff (1992) and Parks (2013) defined crisis as disruption that physically impacts an entire system and

threatens basic and core missions. According to Cufaude (2002), a tragedy essentially challenges people's sense of how the world operates. This unanticipated chaos creates a need for transition to a new state of equilibrium. Stressful environments contain much uncertainty, volatility, and turbulence (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Krackhardt and Stern (1988) expressed that crisis refers to a situation facing an organization, which requires that, the organization, under time constraints, to engage in new, untested, unlearned behaviors in order to obtain or maintain its desired goal states.

Crises create difficult circumstances for anyone affected by them. They are perhaps the most challenging situations that a leader will face in his or her career. People experience crises as episodes of threat and uncertainty, a grave predicament requiring urgent action (Parks, 2013; Rosenthal, Boin & Comfort, 2001). Unfortunately, there is precious little formal education or training and until recently, scant research on how to lead under the extraordinarily pressure-filled times that crises create (James & Wooten, 2010).

An unexpected death of a student-athlete is tragic and create a crisis. The unexpected death in and of itself does not represent the full crisis. Crisis dwells within each of the survivors. According to McCauley and Powell (2007), the death of a college friend may be a college student's first close experience with death and with their own mortality at a time when life, for the most part, holds a great deal of promise and possibility. College is typically a time of increased stress, rapid change and less connection to family and other familiar support systems. Therefore, college students may be more vulnerable to the emotional distress of death. This phase of life may compound

the normal, intense emotional reactions to the death of someone close (McCauley & Powell, 2007).

Within our western culture, funeral and memorial rituals are performed with hopes for closure, but as grief experts report this is not closure, it is only the beginning of a complex multifaceted grief process (Dorney, 2014). Dorney's dissertation and phenomenological study, *The Lived Experience of Baccalaureate Nursing Students Following the Death of a Classmate,* explored the grief experiences, coping strategies, and reactions of traditional college age baccalaureate-nursing students following the unanticipated, sudden death of a classmate. According to Dorney (2014), the three contemporary models of grief and bereavement currently receiving attention are Worden's Task Based Approach (Worden, 2009; Worden & Winokuer, 2011), the Dual Process Model of Grief (Stroebe & Schut, 1999) and meaning reconstruction and loss (Holland, Currier & Neimeyer, 2006). For the purpose of this study, an in-depth explanation of these grief models is not required. Dorney (2014) stated contemporary models of bereavement have replaced traditional models of grief, viewing grief as a dynamic process, changing in nature rather than a series of predictable series of predictable stages. Neimeyer (2004) and Dorney (2014) noted that no one theoretical paradigm is currently dominant in bereavement and grief research.

In her Master's Thesis, *Supporting Grief: The Attitudes and Belief of Residence Life Professionals When Responding to Student Bereavement,* Flatt (2015) discussed the six areas of a college student's life that are affected when grieving, identified in research conducted by David Balk (2011). These areas are: 1) physical; 2) emotional; 3)

cognitive; 4) behavioral; 5) interpersonal and 6) spiritual. Responding to the death of a student is an unfortunate reality for post-secondary institutions (Flatt, 2015) and bereavement does not affect all students in the same way (Balk, 2011). Problematically, students studying in higher education, particularly those living away from their families; are in an environment that may not be conducive to explore and express grief (Flatt, 2015; Matthews & Servaty-Seib, 2007). Balk (2011) stated there is no blue print to the college bereavement process. There appears to be limited, if any, publications addressing athletics and the leadership experience of coaches that follows an unexpected college student-athlete death. Since it is the responsibility of the leaders to guide their organizations and people through these (crisis) events, crisis and leadership are closely intertwined phenomena (Parks, 2013).

Transformational Leadership During a Crisis

According to O'Boyle, Murray, & Cummins (2015) transformational leadership is particularly apparent in the organizational field and past research describes transformational leaders as having the ability to promote a cooperative working environment, foster a culture of trust, give regular feedback, provide solutions through time of crises and implement a participative decision-making process. The review of literature suggests that transformational leadership is promising especially in challenging situations such as crises (Bass, 1985; Borman et al., 2016). Under crisis-ridden or uncertain conditions, transactional leadership that tends to be reactive and depend upon old rules and regulations to maintain and control the system, are unlikely to help followers cope with situations (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transformational leadership is

more effective because it is proactive, breaks with tradition, provides innovative solutions and institutionalizes new arrangements (Bass, 1990, Bass & Riggio, 2006). Regardless of crisis type, entire organizations have been renewed when a leader is able to communicate a clear set of shared values and a common purpose for all stakeholders (Ulmer, Sellnow & Seeger, 2011).

Transformational leadership may also be more effective in a crisis; because unlike directive or transactional leadership that may focus on short-term results and be prone to hasty, poorly thought-out decisions, transformational leadership tends to delay making premature choices among options (Bass & Riggio, 2006). In organizational crises, adaption and cooperation are important that subsequently require trust & friendly relationships. This suggests that the organization is in better shape to handle crises, uncertainty and threats of required change if it's utilizing transformational leadership principles (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Krackhardt & Stern, 1988).

Summary

College sport team coaches are the leaders of their team. The unexpected death of a collegiate student-athlete can create a crisis leadership situation. Coaches face a leadership challenge when leading their team following an unexpected death of a student-athlete. In addition to the standard coaching challenges of enhancing intrinsic motivation, improving performance of individuals and the team, creating positive team outcomes, building better people, and striving for excellence, a collegiate sport team coaches may need to guide their teams through a grief experience. The leadership behaviors utilized by the coach impact both the team and each individual team member.

Transformational Leadership theory provides a viable framework for investigating coaching behaviors. Transformational Leadership theory has shown to be effective in a wide range of situations, including applicability during sport team coaching and crisis situations. Leaders utilizing transformational leadership behaviors tend to focus on their people. They tend to avoid hasty decisions, focus on the long-term, communicate effectively, foster trust, reduce follower's stress, and provide new ideas. Transformational leaders inspire followers to exceed expected performance levels, develop their leadership capacity, and increase their commitment and energy toward the team and its goals.

Avolio and Bass's (1991) *Full Range Leadership Model* (FRL) includes the transformational leadership theory. Four leadership behaviors form the Transformational Leadership theory. They are Individualized Consideration, Intellectual Stimulation, Inspirational Motivation and Idealized Influence. Transformational leadership behaviors are inherently positive. The reminder of the FRL is composed of Transactional Leadership and Passive Avoidant Leadership theories and behaviors. The FRL provides an opportunity to evaluate passivity vs. activity and effectiveness vs. ineffectiveness of leadership behaviors and actions.

Crisis situations and leadership appear to be connected phenomena. This connectivity provides opportunity for both investigation and future learning. Transformational leadership theory would appear to provide a context for future growth and learning opportunities for leaders given that transformational leadership behaviors can be developed.

CHAPTER III

Methodology

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of five NCAA Division I or Division II intercollegiate sport-team head coaches who led their teams following the unexpected death of a current student-athlete. The following research questions were the focus of this study:

- How do NCAA Division I or Division II sport-team coaches describe the experience of leading their team in the competitive season following a student-athlete death?

- In what ways, if any, do NCAA Division I or Division II sport-team coaches' descriptions of their leadership approaches, beliefs and actions while leading their teams following the unexpected death of a student-athlete correlate to established components of Transformational Leadership?

This study utilized a transcendental phenomenological approach (Husserl, 1931) as the guiding research method. Phenomenology was the best-suited tradition because it focused on the specific experience of the participants and how they felt and perceived their experience (Hayes, 2012). Information about phenomenology, the participants, data collection, and Colaizzi's (1978) method of data analysis are discussed. The chapter also addresses topics of trustworthiness, validity and credibility of this research.

Research Design

Qualitative inquiry is the most humanistic and person-centered way of discovering and uncovering thoughts and actions of human beings (Holloway & Biley,

2011). The application of a qualitative design allowed for participants to share their experiences through interviews and dialogue without being bound to a more structured format in quantitative methods (Creswell, 2003; Parks, 2013). The specific qualitative approach known as phenomenology was selected as the research methodology due to the study focus on describing the shared experience of multiple sport-team coaches. Phenomenology is the proper research method when the researcher wants to understand more deeply a specific phenomenon after learning of the common experiences among participants (Creswell, 2013; Juneau, 2014).

Rationale for the method. The type of problem best suited for phenomenological research is one in which it is important to understand several individuals' shared experience of a phenomenon in order to develop a deeper understanding about the features of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Phenomenology, as a qualitative research method, seeks to describe and unfold a phenomenon before the eyes of the researcher and reader so the essence of the participant's narratives can be experienced and understood (Munhall, 1994). Phenomenological researchers set aside or bracket out their perceptions and experiences with the phenomenon. They aim to examine the experience fresh and again, as if, for the first time. The phenomenological researcher seeks to understand how the participants are telling their story (Dorney, 2014). Researchers set aside their own bias and experience in the pursuit of understanding the experience of the other (Dorney, 2014).

It is the role of the researcher to gather information from those who have experienced the events being studied and to develop a description of what exactly was

experienced, and how the subjects experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Parks, 2013). According to Creswell (2013) a phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences. The researcher relies on multiple participant views and their individually created meanings to construct a rich description of the phenomenon. Because the descriptions of natural objects are derived from experience, experience itself must be clearly understood before a firm foundation can be established for the sciences of studying the natural world (Polkinghorne, 1989)

Description of phenomenological research. Phenomenology is commonly described as the study of lived experience (Creswell, 2013). Individuals experience and reflect on their own world. From these experiences and reflections, an individual reality is created. What appears in our consciousness is the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Creswell (2013) stated the focus of a phenomenological study is describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon. Collectively individuals who have individually experienced a specific phenomenon objectively share with others a common yet unique and personal reality.

According to Parks (2013), Husserl stated that true phenomenological research seeks to describe common events rather than derive an explanation of why they occurred. In phenomenological research, a researcher combines many perspectives in order to get a cohesive understanding of the phenomenon being researched (Juneau, 2014; Moustakas, 1994). The researcher seeks to uncover the essence or structure of a shared experience.

Phenomenological research enables a researcher to identify the fundamental nature of shared human experiences as they are described by those who live them (Parks,

2013). Objectively shared common meaning with a given phenomenon is the primary area of a phenomenological investigation. When researchers conduct qualitative research, they are embracing the idea of multiple realities (Creswell, 2013). The researcher is striving to gather the essence of a shared experience rather than draw conclusions from the findings.

The premise of transcendental phenomenology is that the focus is primarily placed on the participant's description of the events as opposed to the interpretations of the researcher (Moustakas, 1994; Parks, 2013). According to Creswell (2013), developing a composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals is the goal of a phenomenological study. This essence contains descriptions that consist of "what" they experienced and "how" they experienced it, not explanations or analyses (Moustakas, 1994).

Unlike quantitative research, which values objectivity, phenomenology demands a personal investment into the topic being studied (Dorney, 2014; Sarter, 1988). According to Moustakas (1994), phenomena are the building blocks of human science and the basis for all knowledge. Phenomenology calls researchers, despite their personal connection, to return "to the things themselves" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26).

In the phenomenological tradition, researcher bias is understood. Approaching the topic afresh without preconceived notions about what one will find in the investigation is a main emphasis of phenomenological research (Polkinghorne, 1989). The practice of bracketing or setting aside one's own experience in the phenomenological tradition allows a researcher to approach a phenomenon again, as if, for the first time and

gain a fresh perspective on the phenomenon being examined. In phenomenology, the researcher transcends or suspends past knowledge and experience to understand a phenomenon at a deeper level (Merleau-Ponty, 1956). The researcher attempts to approach a lived experience with a sense of newness to elicit rich and descriptive data (Anderson & Spencer, 2002).

Types of phenomenology. A review of the methodology literature shows primarily two different phenomenological approaches: hermeneutic or transcendental phenomenology. Pilot and Beck (2012) further described these two schools of thought or methods of phenomenology as either: descriptive or interpretive. Hermeneutic phenomenology as described by van Manen (1990) and Creswell (2013) is geared both toward exploring and interpreting life experiences. In hermeneutic phenomenology, the researcher not only generates a description of a phenomenon, but also makes an interpretation of the meaning of the experience.

This is contrasted with Moustakas's (1994) description of transcendental phenomenology where the researcher focuses less on interpretation and more on the description of participant's experience with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). By paying close addition to bracketing their previous experiences, researchers strive to take a fresh look at the experience through the eyes of the participants. Within transcendental phenomenology everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). In order to experience a phenomenon again as if for the first time, the researcher seeks to acknowledge their experiences and potential bias through a process of Epoche or bracketing.

Epoche and bracketing. According to Creswell (2013), creating an Epoche is an important part of qualitative research, as it allows the researcher to express any personal feelings or thoughts that may be brought into an interview so that he or she may set these feelings and thoughts aside in order to have fresh eyes on the situation. Qualitative researchers can try to minimize bias when conducting research by acknowledging the biases and assumptions they bring to the study (Juneau, 2014). Bracketing is a process of setting aside one's beliefs, feelings, and perceptions to be more open or faithful to the phenomenon (Anderson & Spencer, 2002; Colaizzi, 1978). As an NCAA intercollegiate sport-team head coach and leader who experienced leading a team in the season following a student-athlete death, it was necessary for me to acknowledge and bracket these experiences.

The phenomenological researcher strives to identify the true essence or meaning of the phenomenon, and present this as it truly appears to the participants, a concept which Husserl (1931) described as going "back to the things themselves" (as cited in Wall, Glenn, Mitchinson, & Poole, 2004, p. 21). The process of returning to this original state of awareness regarding the phenomenon is referred to as "phenomenological reduction" (p. 21) and the manner in which this is achieved is known as bracketing.

In some forms of phenomenology, the researchers bracket themselves out of the study by discussing personal experience with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Bracketing does not remove the researcher completely from the study. Bracketing becomes the tool, which allows the researcher to open one's consciousness to the portrayal of the participant's experience (Dorney, 2014). The object of bracketing is to

allow the researcher to focus on the experiences of the participants in the study (Creswell, 2013). Bracketing is not a matter of forgetting what has been experienced, but of not letting past knowledge be engaged while collecting and analyzing participants' experiences (Creswell, 2013). In describing Husserl's ideas of transcendental phenomenology, Moustakas (1994) and Parks (2013) explained that eliminating prejudgment or presupposition is critical if researchers are to understand the experiences being studied.

Participants

A purposeful sample of five NCAA Division I or Division II intercollegiate sport-team head coaches who led their teams in the season following the unexpected student-athlete death were selected to participate in this study. Purposeful sampling is appropriate when participants are believed to have an in-depth knowledge about a specific topic (Juneau, 2014; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). In order for the researcher to develop meaning from the research, careful selection must be made of participants who have experienced the phenomenon in question (Creswell, 2013; Juneau, 2014).

NCAA Division I or Division II head coaches were identified through public media or by using a snowball sampling method. Unexpected student-athlete deaths are often covered as newsworthy events in both mainstream news media and on social media. These media stories create a sample from which to identify and invite potential participants. Snowballing was utilized, as needed, to further identify potential research participants by asking participants if they know of other coaches who have led their teams following the unexpected death of a student-athlete.

It is essential for a phenomenological study that all participants share the experience to be studied. As previously discussed in Chapter I, the following criteria was utilized for participant selection.

- Must have been a NCAA Division I or Division II intercollegiate sport-team head coach during the season following an unexpected death of a student-athlete.

- At least one calendar year must have passed since the completion of the team's season following the student-athlete death.

- Both male and female sport-team head coaches who are coaching teams of either gender were identified and selected.

- No participants or their athlete or athletes who passed away directly coached with or been coached directly by the researcher.

Data Collection

The main data collection procedures in this study involved semi-structured interviews of the participant coaches. Semi-structured interviewing is the typical data gathering technique for phenomenology studies (Moustakas, 1994; Juneau, 2014) because it provides a natural, conversational way for participants to share their stories. Creswell (2013) noted that phenomenological research could consist of only a single interview or more than one interview.

Approval to conduct this study was obtained from the Minnesota State University, Mankato Institutional Review Board (IRB). An IRB proposal was submitted in accordance with required procedures. Following IRB approval from Minnesota State University, Mankato, potential research participants were sent an invitation email to

participate in the study, which involved a one-hour interview with a few demographic questions followed by open ended questions that asked them to share their story about what they experienced in leading their team following the unexpected death of a student-athlete. The invitation email contained information about the purpose of the study, voluntary participation, ability to withdraw, confidentiality and instructions on how to agree to participate.

Pilot interview. In preparation of actual interviews, one pilot interview was conducted with a Division I head coach who had experienced leading their team following the unexpected death of a student-athlete. The purpose of the pilot interview was to identify and address any unforeseen challenges that may arise during data collection and help create familiarity and comfort for the researcher with the craft of interviewing (Parks, 2013). The pilot interview provided an opportunity to review and analyze research interview questions to determine if they would accomplish intended goals or may need to be revised (Maxwell, 2005; Parks, 2013).   The results and analysis of the pilot interview were not included in the final reporting of this study.

Interviews. All participants were required to submit a signed informed consent. Participants were assigned fictitious names for identification of all transcriptions, field notes, journaling, etc. After assigning fictitious names, semi-structured interviews were conducted and recorded over the telephone at a time that was convenient for each participating coach. Participating coaches selected their own location for the telephone interview. This allowed the participating coaches to feel comfortable in their own surroundings while participating in the interview. One participant conducted the

interview in their car while driving. The researcher conducted and recorded all the calls in the same office location. This office location was private and free from any distractions. This allowed for privacy and a peaceful controlled-environment for the researcher to hear the participating coaches' stories and focus on their experience of leading their team following the unexpected death of their student-athlete. Interviews lasted between 45 to 90 minutes.

Participants were asked to share their coaching and leadership stories from the season following the unexpected death of a student-athlete. Semi-structured interview questions were utilized to explore the participants' leadership behaviors, attitudes and reflections within the context of the tragedy (see Appendix A for interview questions). The interview questions were open-ended and specifically for NCAA Division I or Division II sport-team head coaches, few in number, and stated in straightforward language (Hatch, 2002). Moustakas (1994) observed that guiding questions may be written before interviews in a phenomenological study, but the interview may change direction or focus once the participants begin describing their experiences. No notable changes to the interviews direction were experienced during the participant interviews.

General meaning and themes were derived through the use of open-end questions and dialogue with those who have lived the experience (Moustakas, 1994; Parks, 2013; Smith & Osborn, 2007). Two questions, "how" and "what" was experienced, provided the concrete framework for asking questions and recording answers (Creswell & Morer-Urdahl, 2004). The semi-structured interview questions and specific transformational leadership questions with potential follow-up strategies that were used are detailed in

Appendix A and Appendix B. This interview approach relied on individual experiences and stories told from the participants' voices and not those of the researcher or from individuals reporting studies in the literature, an approach consistent with human science research (Creswell & Morer-Urdahl, 2004).

All interviews were audio recorded using a PR200 Recorder Gear bluetooth wireless cell phone call and voice recorder. Upon completion, the interviews were professionally transcribed into a Microsoft Word document by an online transcription service. This professional transcription took place prior to any coding and loading the data into a qualitative software program for data analysis.

Interviews were conducted over a four-week span. This allowed for appropriate preparation, journaling and reflection by the researcher. No interviews were conducted on the same day for the same reasons. A reflexive journal kept throughout the entire research process provided the opportunity to capture the emotion and spirit of the participants' interviews, bracket both my experience and emotion, and keep field notes.

Reflexive journal. Observational field notes were entered into a reflexive journal before, during, or shortly after each interview. Particular focus was on non-verbal behaviors, characteristics of the participant, tone of the conversation, and emotional responses of either the researcher or participant. Miles and Huberman (1994) and Parks (2013), explained that memo and field notes enable the researcher to record what they see, think, and feel throughout the research process. Due to my close connection and relevant experience with the phenomenon being examined, I maintained a reflexive journal throughout the study.

A goal of the journal was to aid in the bracketing out of preconceptions and biases based on my experience with the phenomenon. Journaling continued throughout the data analysis period, reflecting on methodological problems, writing up findings, and addressing biases (Dorney, 2014; Polit & Beck, 2012). Guidelines by Wall et al. (2004) provide a 4-step reflective framework process that was implemented before, during, and after different research phases:

1. Pre-reflective preparation. This step encourages the researcher to prepare mentally in advance for certain situations. As the method of data collection for this investigation was the interview, it was important that time was set aside beforehand to bring to mind specific issues and beliefs that would require bracketing.

2. Reflection. Reflections involve describing the situation in detail, identifying any factors that had influence on the situation, and providing evidence of critical analysis on the extent to which bracketing was achieved.

3. Learning. The reflective framework should identify what new learning has taken place as a result of each situation and its reflection. Learning could include interpersonal aspects of conducting interviews and either positive or negative bracketing experiences.

4. Action from learning. This step clearly identifies how the new learning could be utilized within other situations, such as during subsequent interviews. It might as be possible to transfer learning into the methodological decision-making process of the study.

Data Analysis

The findings of this study resulted from a thorough investigation of the phenomenon. Following each interview, an independent online professional transcription service transcribed the digital recordings verbatim. The researcher reviewed each participant's transcript while listening to the recorded interview to ensure content accuracy of transcription. Each participant was then provided his or her interview transcript for member checking, to review for accuracy and to correct any misrepresentation as a means to increase the trustworthiness of the data. The original transcripts were maintained in a secure file located on a password-protected computer. Interview audio files were deleted from the recording device after uploading to the online professional transcription service and from computer immediately following final transcript review with audio. Transcripts were saved with pseudonyms for participants, university, and deceased student-athletes in order to maintain confidentiality.

As a novice researcher, a detailed data analysis procedure was important to aid in the research process. This procedure helped to structure the analysis process. Data analysis methods frequently used by investigators conducting descriptive phenomenological research include Colaizzi, Giorgi, and Van Kaam's analytic methods. Colaizzi's (1978) procedure is the only phenomenological method of data analysis that calls for returning to the participants themselves to validate the researcher's findings (Daily, 2010; Dorney, 2014; Polit & Beck, 2012:), and was therefore the chosen analysis procedure for this study.

Colaizzi's analysis method. A key feature of Colaizzi's (1978) method is to consistently return to the study participants for reasons that are two-fold. Clearly, returning to the participant enhances the trustworthiness, credibility, and validity of the study. However, returning to the participants regularly throughout the research also provides a partnership of sorts between each research participant and the researcher. This partnership provides the best avenue to ensure the essence of the participants' lived experience was shared properly and may allow for the initial development of a small community of sport-team head coaches who have led their teams following the death of student athlete.

The basic steps of Colaizzi's (1978) analysis method are provided below and then followed by more detailed descriptions of the ways that the steps were conducted during this study.

1. Read all transcripts several times to familiarize the researcher with the data.

2. Extract from transcripts significant statements and phrases and apply codes.

3. Formulate and state meanings for each significant statement.

4. Identify themes among the meanings and cluster them together, verifying this data through review of the original transcripts, and avoid ignoring data that does not cluster into an identified category.

5. Assimilate these themes into a description of the phenomenon.

6. Construct a thorough and comprehensive description of the phenomenon (i.e., the essence of the experience).

7. Return to the participants to validate findings ensuring the researcher has

   accurately and appropriately captured the essence of the experience.

Following Colaizzi's first step, participant transcripts were read and reread on four

different occasions. This included twice reading and rereading the transcripts while

listening to the recorded interview prior to beginning the coding process. The more I

engaged and reflected on the data, the more deeply I began to draw out the essence of

each participant's experience. This prolonged engagement with the data was helpful to

me as a beginning researcher.

The second step of Colaizzi's method (1978) calls for significant sentences and

key phrases that apply to the phenomenon to be identified. Significant sentences and key

phrases were extracted and identified on hard copies of the transcripts. As a researcher, I

then began the third step in Colaizzi's method to formulate a meaning for each identified

significant sentence or key phrase. Through this process of formulating meaning, a set of

initial themes began to emerge.

Following the extraction of significant statements and formulation of meanings

from transcript hard copies, all transcripts were loaded into Dedoose, a web-based online

qualitative research tool that aids with all elements of research analysis. This ranges from

color coding, clustering and extracting themes to multi-layered analysis tools. Dedoose

aided in the continued application of Colaizzi's (1978) analysis method.

Along with descriptor data, preliminary theme codes were created and entered

into to Dedoose. All previously hand-coded transcripts were then re-coded utilizing the

new established set of theme codes. Special attention was paid to data that did not seem

to fit any theme, so that nothing was prematurely discarded that may be later found to be important. Six initial main theme codes (Emotion, Leading Self, Continued Impact, University Response, Growth, and Leading Team) with 35 underlying identified sub-themes generated 324 significant statement excerpts. This initial re-coding process was followed by a return to the data and additional reflection and data analysis.

Working through Colaizzi's (1978) fourth step of the methodical process to phenomenological inquiry, multi-runs of data analysis and reflection were conducted without immediately discarding any of the lesser data themes or codes. Numerical analysis of participants' significant statements was conducted that included statements regarding a particular main theme or sub-theme, the frequency that an individual participant made such a statement, and the overall frequency that such a statement was made by all the participants. Dedoose's analysis capabilities were relied on for filtering out data, showing prevalent patterns and themes and allowing connections within the data that traditional reading, rereading, coding and organizing would not permit.

During this numerical analysis, the researcher was provided the opportunity to reflect on and reassess the relevancy of main themes and their corresponding sub-themes. Particular attention was paid to main themes and sub-themes that might be combined together and redundant coding. The process was guided by reflecting on the true essence of the participants' experiences of leading their sport team following the unexpected death of a student-athlete.

The main themes and their sub-themes with the lowest number of responses from participants and the lowest number of frequencies of responses were further analyzed:

University Response and Reaction, Growth as a Leader, Continued Impact and Leading Self. All participants made enough significant statements with good frequency for both Growth as a Leader and University Response to remain-as main themes.

Upon further analysis of participants' statements, in Continued Impact and Leading Self themes, it appeared that many sub-themes would be better categorized under a different main theme. Additionally, reviewing and re-reading the participants' statements demonstrated that some redundant coding existed. Participant significant statements appeared across main themes and sub-themes. After re-categorizing and recoding these participant statements, Continued Impact and Leading Self were eliminated as main themes. This process resulted in the emergence of four main themes. The main themes that emerged from this second review were Emotion, Leading Team, University Response and Reaction and Growth as a Leader.

Colaizzi's fifth step of analysis followed the establishment of these four main themes. In assimilating the themes into a description of the phenomenon, the significant statements that supported each main theme were re-evaluated for relevancy to describe the essence of participants' experience with the phenomenon. As before, special attention was paid to significant statements that did not appear to fit into any theme to ensure nothing important was prematurely discarded. Thoughtfully and carefully, significant statements were reassigned to new main themes or sub-themes, as applicable or eliminated. The main theme of Leading Team was eliminated as being too broad and was narrowed to a main theme of Leadership Challenges. Some of its remaining sub-

themes were re-analyzed and subsequently connected to Bass and Riggio's (2006) four established dimensions of Transformational Leadership.

In sum, this analysis process thus far resulted in the establishment of four main themes for this study which were: Emotion, Leadership Challenges, University Response and Reaction, and Growth as a Leader. Additionally, the construct of Transformational Leadership was confirmed and supported in each of its four dimensions which were: Idealized Influence, Individual Consideration, Inspirational Motivation and Intellectual Stimulation. Sub-themes were arranged under the main themes and Transformational Leadership dimensions and correlated to supporting participant statements.

From these clusters of themes, dimensions, sub-themes, and statements, Colaizzi's sixth step was implemented which involved the construction of the essence of the experience. In brief, creating this essence entailed utilizing the participants' own narrative to describe the lived experience of leading a NCAA Division I or II sports team following the unexpected death of a student-athlete. An essence of the experience strives to capture the core and essential human elements of the lived phenomenon.

Finally, the seventh and last step of Colaizzi's analysis method involved returning to the participants for their verification of the accuracy of the transcripts, researcher interpretations, and the essence of the experience. This is explained more in the following section on Trustworthiness, and specifically in the Member Checking section.

Trustworthiness. The term trustworthiness parallels the standard of reliability and validity of quantitative research (Dorney, 2014; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Polit & Beck, 2012). According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), the criteria for trustworthiness in

qualitative research include credibility, dependability, conformability, transferability and authenticity. In accordance with phenomenological principles, scientific investigation is valid when the knowledge sought is arrived at through descriptions that make possible an understanding of the meanings and essences of experience (Moustakas, 1994). The following validation strategies were utilized for this study.

Clarifying research bias. Acknowledging and clarifying research bias from the outset of the study is important so that the reader understands the researcher's position on any biases or assumptions that impact the inquiry (Merriam, 1988). The researcher described and commented on past experiences with the phenomenon, prejudices and orientations that likely shaped the approach to the study (Creswell, 2013) in the text of the Epoche/preface and Chapter I, in reflexive journaling, and via continual bracketing throughout data collection and analysis.

Member checking. Following the professional transcription of each interview into a Microsoft Word Document, the participants were provided the interview text to review for accuracy and to correct any misinterpretations or miscommunications that may have happened during their interviews (Juneau, 2014; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). The intention was for participants to feel more comfortable and relaxed sharing their experiences knowing they would have the opportunity to review their interview text. Capturing the most accurate description of their experience was the goal. Moustakas (1994) identified it is the responsibility of researchers to ensure truthful and complete responses by helping interviewees to be comfortable.

In member checking, the researcher solicits participants' views of credibility of the findings and interpretations (Creswell, 2013). This technique is considered by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to be the most critical technique for establishing credibility. Participant confirmation of descriptions can enhance credibility and authenticity and bring validity to the transcriptions (Hatch, 2002; Hayes, 2012).

Additionally, following analysis of the data, and the development of the essence of the experience by the researcher in accordance with Colaizzi (1978), participants had an opportunity to review the essence of the experience to determine if the findings corresponded to how the participants truly experienced the phenomenon (Creswell & Clark, 2012; Juneau, 2014). This was the important seventh step in Colaizzi's analysis method and involved returning to each participant and asking – "How do my descriptive results compare with your experiences?" and "Have any aspects of your experience been omitted?" (Polkinghorne, 1989). Participant validation of the essence of the experience enhanced its validity and authenticity (Moustakas, 1994) and allowed for any relevant new data to be worked into a revised final description (Polkinghorne, 1989).

Rich, thick description. A phenomenological study's aim is to capture the essence of the experience through both a textural and structural description. Thick, rich description was used in describing the analysis processes and the essence of the experience in this study to allows the reader to make decisions concerning transferability, which describes the process of applying the results in one situation to other similar situations (Creswell, 2013). According to Denzin (1989) and Parks (2013), in thick descriptions, the voices, feelings, actions, and meaning of interacting are heard.

Therefore, the findings in this study maintained as much detail of the participants' actual words as possible to create a thick description and to recreate the scenes and situations being discussed for the reader (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Parks, 2013).

Reporting Findings

Following the analysis of the data, both a textual and structural description were developed. These descriptions captured the essence of the experience: leading a sport team in the season following the unexpected death of a student-athlete. The phenomenological approach relies on individual experiences, meaning that the stories to be told will be told from the participants' voices and not those of the researcher or from individuals reporting studies in the literature, an approach consistent with human science research (Creswell & Morer-Urdahl, 2004). The purpose of phenomenological research is to produce clear, precise, and systematic descriptions of the meaning that constitutes the activity of consciousness (Polkinghorne, 1989). A phenomenology ends with an essence of the experience for individuals who lived the phenomenon incorporating "what" they have experienced and "how" they experienced it (Creswell, 2013).   The goal of the essence of the experience is to enable the reader to feel that they understand better what it is like for someone to experience the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Polkinghorne, 1989).

CHAPTER IV

Findings of Study

This chapter will describe the findings of this transcendental phenomenological study that explored the leadership and coaching experience of NCAA Division I or II sport team coaches who led their team following the unexpected death of a student-athlete. Transcendental phenomenology is often referred to as the science of examples in which participants' words and raw emotions are heavily relied on to capture the essence of the experience (Munhall, 2012, p. 130).

This chapter begins with a brief introduction to the five NCAA coaches who courageously shared their stories regarding their leading experience following the unexpected death of a student-athlete. The researcher throughout the study maintained a reflexive journal. Portions of the reflexive journal will be shared to demonstrate bracketing and provide additional insight into the experience of the researcher during this transcendental phenomenological study.

From the participants' narrative interviews, four main themes with several sub-themes emerged describing the experience of leading a sports team following the unexpected death of a student-athlete. The four main emergent themes were Emotion, Leadership Challenges, Growth as a Leader and University Reaction and Response. Several sub-themes were found to support Bass and Riggio's (2006) established four components of the Transformational Leadership theory. These established components being Idealized Influence, Individual Consideration, Inspirational Motivation and Intellectual Stimulation. Beyond emergent themes, utilizing Coliazzi's method (1978) of

phenomenological analysis, the *essence of experience* of this coaching leadership

phenomenon was created.

Introduction of Participants

As a reminder from Chapter III who the participants were, the purposeful sample

for this study included five Division I or II sport team coaches from five different

universities across the United States of America. The coaches represented two male

sports teams and three female sports teams. All the coaches held advanced university

degrees, including four Master's degrees and one PhD. Coaches all experienced the

sudden death of a student-athlete. No deaths were the result of prolonged illness.

Additionally, no deaths were the result of suicide. None of the participant coaches had

previously experienced leading their team following the death of a student-athlete. A

brief description of the university, circumstance of the death event, participants'

demographics and experience coaching are presented in the following paragraph.

Pseudonyms are used for each participant, deceased student-athlete and a generic

university moniker in order to maintain confidentiality.

Ann is a NCAA Division I softball coach at a Midwestern university. She is

sixty-three years old and has been an intercollegiate coach for forty years. She had been

coaching at the university for twenty years when *Amy* passed away in a car accident at the

beginning her 2nd semester. *Amy*'s passing occurred a few months before their

championship season was set to begin. *Amy*'s passing occurred twenty years prior to this

study. Ann is still coaching at the university.

Betty is a NCAA Division II cross country/track and field coach at a Great Lakes university. She is forty-two years old and has been an intercollegiate coach for eighteen years. She had been coaching at the university for seven years when *Bea* was hit by a car and passed away. *Bea*'s passing during a practice run occurred eleven years prior to this study. Betty is still coaching at the university.

Carl was a NCAA Division I men's soccer coach at an Atlantic region university. He is sixty years old and coached at the intercollegiate level for thirty-two years. He had been coaching at the university for twenty years when *Cody* and *Cole* passed away in a single car accident. *Cody*'s and *Cole*'s passing occurred during the season three years prior to this study. Carl is retired from the university.

Dan is currently a NCAA Division I baseball coach at a West Coast university. He is forty-two years old and has been coaching at the intercollegiate level for eighteen years. He is no longer at the university where his student-athlete passed way. Dan had been at university for three years when *Dylan* passed away following a summer skateboarding accident. *Dylan* passed away ten years ago prior to this study.

Earl is a NCAA Division I women's soccer coach at a Great Plains university. He is fifty-three years old and has been coaching at the intercollegiate level for thirty-one years. Earl had been at the university for ten years when *Erin* was shot and murdered during a spring semester unofficial team gathering. *Erin* passed away fourteen years prior to this study. Earl is still coaching at the university.

Reflexive Journal

To increase trustworthiness in the data and aid in bracketing (i.e., setting aside) my own experiences, I maintained a reflexive journal throughout the research process. Additionally, I followed the four-step journaling process outlined in Chapter III for each interview. In brief, these steps entailed 1) Pre-reflective preparation before each interview, 2) Reflection during and following each interview, 3) Identifying my new learning, and 4) Identifying actions for utilizing my new learning (see pages 64-68 for more detail).

The four-step reflexive journal process for the interviews served many purposes. It allowed me to focus on bracketing out my experience and to prepare emotionally for each interview. Journaling during the interview allowed me to capture any key words or emotions from the participants and really aided my active listening. Post-interview reflection allowed me to capture my immediate emotional reaction, again bracket out my story and experience, and provided me an avenue for capturing details from the interview experience. Lastly, the action for learning journal entries always followed at least one-night of reflection and provided the opportunity to analyze the interview methodology and target future adjustments and improvements.

The verbatim excerpts from my journal below were specifically selected to show glimpse into my emotion, my bracketing experience, reflections throughout the interview process and my general field notes. To maintain authenticity and rawness of emotion for these excerpts, no changes or corrections were made for grammar, misspellings, or

sentence fragments. In an effort to continue to enhance confidentiality, no during-

interview journal excerpts will be included.

November 9, 2017. *Day one of research sending out participation emails of emotional. Excited for next step in this process of looking forward to getting data. Hopefully, a few coaches will agree to help. Feel conflicted and a bit nervous about what they will say and share. Wonder if I did it wrong; no I did the best I could and that there's no real right or wrong way to lead through this kind of tragedy. Eager and anxious to move forward.*

November 23, 2017. *Schedule first to official interviews excited and nervous glad to have these two interviews. (…) set up a pilot study with Paul…*

First mistake today forgot to change font color on university the school disclosure page counseling service email...

Reflecting on interview questions. *Excited and a bit nervous to be here. Genuine interest in how others faced & led through their tragedy.*
An area to be sure and to bracket will be thoughts and feelings of right versus wrong in terms of approach. I.e. they did this and this was more right than what I did.

Be sure to be compassionate with myself about comparing responses.

November 25, 2017. *Reached a conclusion about pseudo-names letters first letter reflects order & name reflects gender. Example Pilot = Paul & interview one = Art/Ann.*

Bit nervous about recording device. Concerned about Bluetooth volume and my ability to hear. (…) After fourth test run will try Bluetooth recorder for pilot…

November 26, 2017.
Action steps from learning – Pilot interview. *Pre-interview process was positive. Taking a walk helped focus and calm nerves.*

PJM offices good comfortable set up… Interview script was helpful. Eliminate sports question already available and more efficient interview time.

Look at strategy for overcoming coach speak answers. Saying lots with little substance and sliding into canned program answers and jargon.

Work on asking questions/follow-up questions about responses feelings and attitudes. Needed to help create essence of experience

Strategy for follow up that asked about specifics regarding coach's experience as it relates to specific situations

When reviewing tape and transcript listen for interruptions allow them to talk all the way and or refocus if needed.

December 1, 2017.

Ann - Pre-reflective. *75 minutes in advance/gaining focus prior (...) and then interview*

Feel positive about process and technology/go slow to start ... Positive energy and eagerness to keep rolling and keep gathering data.

Focus will be on listening and following up with questions about feelings, response, attitudes, and specific situations.

Choose to suspend my feelings and reactions of comparing and evaluating my experience compared to coach Ann's... Digging to find the essence of experience

December 2, 2017.

Post-interview – Betty. *Strong reaction for me as a researcher. Good job of not filling in my thoughts and just listening to Betty's answers.*

Was not prepared for her to turntables and asked me about my experience and how I was dealing with my situation.

Felt comfortable with my responses will be curious to hear and read what really said. Need to be better prepared for future interviews.

Feel better with the process few questions I think need to be adjusted/eliminated.

Real investment in conversation first emotional reaction when telling story. Could hear her emotion and passion in her voice throughout.

Always there, feel guilty when not at forefront of mind but gotta move forward, can go back and recall instantly.

Snowball with other coach at school who had similar experience. Falls outside the current study parameters.

Really spoke openly about her feelings and challenges leading. Out-of-control scary hard sad.

Script is very helpful. Keeping on track and really helping with bracketing. Thoughts and feelings can't wander out of move on to next question and hear answer for follow-up.

December 17, 2017. *Betty listening & reviewing transcript*

Emotional reaction to story. Hear the sadness in her voice she shared her story.

Again, how to remove other identifiers/names from transcription? Needs to be following review by participant. Want to see/feel/read their story…

… Steer away from specifics if asked about my story. Share less. Did well without going into too long.

December 18, 2017.

Carl - Pre-interview. *Feeling a little bit eager to interview well.*
Eager to revise interview script and questions want to cover the areas following questions between Paul Ann Betty improving.

Want to make sure that it is the follow-up questions that evolve. Allowing for both a follow-up based on current combo and b based on follow-up based on previous conversations/areas of interest.

Bracketing out my experiences/stories will only gain importance. Feeling like needs to/remove need to compare my story and see how I did. Be aware that focusing on the participant story allows me to set aside temporarily my experiences and hear their experiences. Follow-up questions have certain bias for me these areas of follow-up may be areas where my story my experiences stronger. Will need to be aware to set these feelings aside temporarily and to hear where each participants story goes.

Go slow and turn on recorder. :-)

Ask follow-up questions about feelings/reactions/attitudes.

Dig to find essence of his experience.

Be ready for table turn questions be brief and respectful in remarks. Return focus to study and challenging nature of circumstance and participants opportunity to review transcripts/review findings.

Action steps – Carl. *Remember to turn on device. Was very helpful.*

During interview reaction sound of voice.

Continue to try to dig down into how it felt. Feels/attitudes/reactions…

Agreed-upon process. Assign pseudo-name prior to transcription review and then after participant review sweep out/adjust remaining identifying words/names phrases, etc.

December 19, 2017.

Post interview - Dan. *Strong emotional reaction to funeral story answer and experience. Sad & lots of memories… Humbled by the real raw emotion of his story...*

Powerful to hear what didn't work and how much he has struggled with and appears to be continue to struggle with…

Really opened up throughout call…Phone call was organic and semi structured

New questions were about 2 to 3 things differently/change may need to pose to others. How he grows as coach he asked and answered own question.

Better listen through some parts brought up memories of Josie. Struggle with the idea all other teams went to funeral.

Comment about staff in new players were interesting. (Maybe a place for future research) Drawn to comment. Until I got over it I couldn't be the best coach for my team like I was. Need to listen to transcript….His emotion caused strong reaction from me.

Was hard to hear this emotion however felt was able to focus in and hear his answers and still asked the needed follow-up question.

December 20, 2017.

Pre-interview - Earl... *Daily life is creeping in a bit, feeling a little unfocused. Will take a walk.*

First-time incoming call as opposed to me calling. Respectful of controlling time.

Remember to listen and hear his story. Giving myself permission to not compare my story with his and his details.

Dig to hear the essence of his experience.

How long did it impact him and his program?

Ask follow-up questions about his feelings reactions attitudes and based on his story.

> ***Action items- Earl…*** *woke up today with the completion not perfection thought …*

> **January 2, 2018.** *Interesting feeling of insecurity with amount of data/quality of data. Haven't really reviewed yet; hopeful it is sufficient to draw themes.*

My reflexive journal was important in my research journey and was critical to my growth as a researcher. It was comforting to know I had a place to go and express myself. Documenting my thoughts and feelings helped me set-aside my own experiences and emotions. This permitted me to draw in closer to the research participants and their experiences without feeling a need to share my story. Each interview became an opportunity to hear and explore their experience, as if for the first time. The participants' words and powerful statements reflect their stories and experience while leading their team following the unexpected death of a student-athlete.

Emergent Phenomenological Themes

From the comprehensive analysis of the narrative interviews, four unique and new themes emerged to describe how the participant coaches experienced the leadership challenges of an unexpected student-athlete death. The four themes that emerged were Emotion, Leadership Challenges, Growth as a Leader and University Response and Reaction. Leading their team following the unexpected death of a student-athlete was a new experience for all the participant coaches. The many challenges brought by this leadership experience affected each participant coach personally and professionally in their coaching role. Though each participant coach experienced the leadership challenges differently, collectively the participant coaches' experiences shared these emergent themes.

In the following pages, selected narratives from the participants that support each of these themes are provided, using their pseudonyms. Some of these narrative selections are edited for brevity, and sometimes are provided verbatim to reveal raw emotions and thought. These are interspersed with my interpretations of their meaning and relevance.

Participating coaches were appreciative of the opportunity to help and share their stories and experience. There was little to no coach-speak from the coaches, where coaches spoke in jargon terms that typically make-up a newspaper quote. All coaches appeared actively engaged in conversation and provided answers with authentic emotion and detail. All interviews were emotional to varying degrees for both the researcher and participants. Pauses in conversation and difficultly finding the right words were common throughout all the interviews. Changes in voice inflection and sighs seemed to indicate an emotional reaction during the conversations. Nervous stuttering and nervous laughter were present for both the researcher and participating coaches. There were no major technological issues with the interview calls or recording, though two calls dropped and had to be re-started.

Emotion

The news was sudden and unexpected for all participants. The tranquility of just coaching an NCAA sports team program was suddenly disrupted with the news that one of their student-athletes or in one case, multiple of their student-athletes had unexpectedly died. They were now leading their team following the unexpected death of a student-athlete. These new circumstances brought with it new leadership challenges and a complex array of emotions and feelings experienced by all the participant coaches.

Betty shared, *"it's stressful at times. You know, because you don't know what [to do], and plus I've been dealing with my own grief, you know."*

Shock. Participants shared a common experience of receiving a phone call to learn about the passing of their student-athlete. The phone call was a catalyst for an emotional reaction from the participants.

Betty: Um, and the phone rang. And it was the hospital. They had called and said there's been an accident. And Bea had been killed... Now [come to] find out, she wasn't supposed to tell me that she was killed on the phone. So I'm in panic like shaking like trying to process what I just heard.

Earl: When I got the phone call, just straight, um, shock, terror… it certainly is surreal… for quite a while afterwards I- bizarrely I would wake up at 3:30, um, or close to it. Um, so I don't know, just terror. I think shock, those would be the big things.

Dan: I think initially I was really, um, I was really, uh … I didn't know how to handle it. Um, I-I think I was just in a, in shock.

Some of the participants went the hospital after receiving the news regarding their student-athlete. The circumstances of hospital were dynamic, placing the participants outside their comfort zone uncertain of exactly what to do.

Carl: Yeah, you feel sometimes like should I even be in here? Not because you don't want to help but sort of [feel] like … am I in the way versus am I helping? But more than anything … but you're, you're in such a state, I was in such a state of shock…

While at hospital, Carl had surviving student-athletes arrive.

Carl: … players were probably just like me; you're still in a state of shock because it just happened.

Fear and uncertainty. None of the participants had experienced leading their teams following the death of a student-athlete. It was a brand new experience and

challenge for them. All the participants shared that they experienced feelings of fear. As they navigated the new circumstances participants communicated that they were uncertain about what to do. Earl thoughts summarized the experience of several of the participants. "*I think that's the tricky part, you know, because, the thing about us coaches as educators, what do we do when we're constantly you know like, taking courses or uh, uh, educating ourselves with degrees or reading articles and, while relying on past experiences of the older, older we got, and things of that-and then suddenly, there's no manual.*"

Ann and Betty shared about the fear and uncertainty with how they and others would react to the passing of the student-athlete.

Ann: Well, I was feeling sort of weird actually because Amy was one of my favorite players. And you know that that can't be a factor.

Betty: So yeah, we were down there [at hospital] ... [I] talked to the parents. You know, her parents are besides themselves too. And, you know, I was just like oh god, they're gonna hate me ...

Both Earl and Carl shared their uncertainty with what to say and how their teams might receive their communication.

Earl: I was just really, really cognizant of that, and I was really aware of, eh, you know what, this is a- a, it's probably the first time I've ever thought this, just saying out loud what I'm thinking. I was really aware of the fact, I didn't know if I had the answers, you know what I mean? ...

As a coach ... I know the fitness program we're giving them is gonna help ... this individual skills training's gonna help ... the way we're gonna set up the play makes sense through all my experiences and, you know, just video and, you know, whatever, but I was really unaware. I remember just, you know, a sense of- of being somewhat vulnerable of I really don't know if this is- what I'm saying to them is helping.

Carl: I'm thinking what should I say, what shouldn't I say, you know ... I always took the stance, ... in lieu of saying more, my fear was just don't say the wrong thing.

Dan shared about his uncertainty and fear about how to communicate with his team. He was uncertain how they might react.

> *Dan: just think that it was everybody could sense that it was bothering them but nobody was willing to say anything ... I think I was scared to put that out there ... I don't know how players would've reacted to [speaking about Kevin's death] and I guess I didn't want to be viewed as using someone's death to get them to play better?*

Painful and devastating. Participants recalled they experienced painful and difficult feelings during the time immediately following their student-athlete passing away. Many of these painful and devastated feelings were directly connected to the circumstances brought on by the unexpected death. Overall, the leadership challenges were many. Dan described the time following the death and the season as "*extremely difficult*".

One of the first painful and challenging circumstances that faced the participants was communication and interaction with their deceased student-athlete's parents.

> *Betty: Bea's parents had called [and we did not speak]. They're [the hospital] like you can't tell them anything. You just have to tell them there's been an accident… I remember sitting outside with Husband like sick to my stomach. I got this as white like gonna pass out, throw up... [I] go back in and I call her parents...[I tell them] there's, there's been an accident. [When they ask about Bea, I say] ...I don't know. I just got here. And then I was just sick to my stomach. I'm lying to them because I know exactly what happened…. Then Bea's parents got there. And that was … one of the worst things. Just having to look them in the eye and know that, you know, she was gone.*

> *Carl: It wa-, it was difficult. It was difficult, I, I felt so sorry for them as parents myself… I was heartbroken as, as, and I found this to still be the way. I was heartbroken for myself in a way 'cause these are my players, but it wa- it didn't, it wasn't even close to how they were gonna feel.*

> *Ann: I was extremely upset because first I was really upset because, um, the kid. I, I adored the kid and the family.*

Carl shared insight into his feelings with regard to his relationship with the families and

then his experience while communicating with the parents. Many of the participants

shared the feelings of admiration for the parents during such a painful time.

>*Carl: Of course, you see 'em when you recruit 'em, but it wasn't like I was really, really close to either set of parents. Um, so my initial reaction to calling is you are a little apprehensive. It's like I'm getting ready to call the mom whose son died less than 24 hours ago… what do I say to her when she picks up the phone? … But I will tell you, both sets of parents were so unbelievably strong … when I first talked to her, she was so strong and so, um, she almost helped me with the conversation...*

As an NCAA Division I or II coach, participants were in a position to speak to the media

on a regular basis. An unexpected death of a student-athlete is not a typical press

conference topic for coaches. However, multi-participants shared the need to speak with

speaking to the media in the immediate aftermath of their tragedy. Earl shared a

particularly impactful and painful experience regarding the media.

>*Earl: one of my most vivid memories… I was in my office and… [Athletic Director] said, "… There's- gonna be a press conference… [we] need you to speak at it… so I go into our- our meeting room, and the place is packed and it was a- it's all- it's a really sad memory for me, because I remember just looking at the reporters, and some of them were so excited. Like they were so excited that this was, uh, you know, like a Division I, uh, kind of big news story, um, in- in essence, you know, like a- a young female Division I athlete has been murdered and- and even a race thing. Like white female athlete, murdered by a- a- a young black male and- and so that- that was- that was shocking for me. Uh, something I'll never forget.*

For both Ann and Betty the funeral was a particularly emotion times for them. The

complexity of feelings that arose during the funeral created feelings of pain and

devastation.

>*Ann: … although I was pretty devastated I was trying to be tough… I didn't succeed with it at the funeral very much. One of the parents said to me, I'll never forget it, "Ann you have got to get yourself together right now. You need to be the leader of this team. Get yourself together."*

Betty: … it was the minute I walked off for the alter and went back and sat, or went back and sat back down that I lost it.

Earl's team had a memorial service in both the university town and in *Erin*'s hometown.

He and his team attended both memorial services. Multiple services were challenging

emotionally.

Earl: Yeah, I remember feeling more worn down at that stage… I think the team did as well, because there were several days … the first one in Town [with] the athletic department, that was very emotional, um, for everyone, and I mean if you just think about … all deaths, you know, are- are hard- hard enough, and you generally, the service and everything like that … you just go through it once.

I think- I think was a little bit of guilt for not just myself, but all the players. You know, like you're going back and you're in with all their friends and family, and in a sense keep in mind the players, that Erin was killed at … an unofficial team gathering.

So then, we… go as a team there. I think- I think a little bit of guilt, a little bit of shame, and then, uh, um, a lotta- a lot of mental fatigue as well, um, so that I just remember everyone feeling, uh, particularly drained.

After funerals and memorial services were held, seasons got under way and the

participants were challenged with leading and guiding their teams. Yet, another new set

of circumstances presented themselves as the participants moved into directly leading

their teams and helping the surviving student-athletes. These experiences were still

painful and hard for the participants.

Betty: … some days are harder than others, just like without any bad thing happening, you know… I was just, I, I got tired, you know. It's amazing you get this like strength and this energy when you're dead tired… But yet, you can plow through because like God's given grace. He just gives you the strength to get through these situations. And then I got tired after a couple days… I was emotionally and physically tired, but yet had to be there every day and put on that face like everything was fine … be there for these kids that needed, needed me or … somebody…. and there's, there's a couple days too, I'd leave at the office. Get in the car and just break down.

Dan: I hope, hope I never have to go through something like this ever again.

All the participants shared their feelings regarding the pain and devastation that the unexpected death caused their teams. Earl's statement summarized the main feelings of many of the participants and the challenges that they faced.

> *Earl: I mean it's a unique thing, as you know it's uh, it just, you know, it's-it's [death of student-athlete] devastating, you know? There's no other ... I know tragedies happen all the time, and, you know, there's car accidents all the time or someone gets shot and killed all the time and stuff like that, but, ... to experience it ... Just try and move the group forward is, I mean, it's an incredible challenge, uh, that's for sure.*

Holding in and burying feelings. Not all participants reported to holding in or burying their feelings. However, those that shared that they held in their feelings expressed very powerful feelings and emotions. For the participants, who were holding in their feelings, the reason why was clear. They were holding in or burying their feelings to put their team first. Carl stated it clearly, *"So I think in some ways I didn't have, I wasn't grieving probably properly at that point because I was dealing with trying to help everyone else who was involved."*

> *Ann: I was working really hard on not, trying not to be emotional… so burying them so I wouldn't, it wouldn't affect the team negatively. So that's what I spent a lot of energy on, readying the team and totally getting into the game itself… a lot of it was just to stay focus at the moment. I spent a lot of time on, uh, "Let's deal with the emotions later. Right now, we're, uh, playing a game, Amy would want that."… I spent a lot of time just keeping my emotions under check, and working hard at burying my feelings, which as I said before, I'm pretty good at **…** the reason I don't maybe remember everything is 'cause as I said, I bury things pretty well.*

> *Betty: Even though I'm dealing with my own grief. I had to put my [grief] aside sometimes… so I put some of my stuff aside a little bit to be here for these kids, and kinda put on that strong face when inside it was hard some days.*

> *Dan: Well it was really hard for me to express to them what I was going through. Um, it was really hard for me to express to them why we couldn't push, or why I didn't want to push the team harder. Um, and it was really hard for them to communicate with me, their thoughts because they knew ... They could see me going through this very difficult time. So, I mean ... I didn't think ... Nobody was on the same page the whole*

season, because the lack of dealing with or how we were dealing with Dylan. Um, and I think that, that's something that, was really hard for anyone to know what to do… You know, um, so yeah, it was, it was just really difficult to- to know what to say, when to say, how to say it… So I just think we all kind of kept it in.

For Dan, holding in and burying feelings and not talking about *Dylan*'s passing included

him as a leader and spread out to his team. Dan stated, "*Just think that, um, we tried so,*

so hard to remember him and honor him, but we didn't deal with the grief ourselves,

individually."

Typically, a college sport's team is a place where emotions are shared. Adversity

is also shared but it usually lacks the intensity of an unexpected death of a team member.

Dan shared the challenges of communicating these new feelings and emotions in the

sports team environment.

Dan: I just think that, you know... We didn't reach out to get help. You know, I think that, you know, as they ... As an 18 to 22 year old kid, or even myself… I was probably 30 years old, 32 years old at the time ... I- I think you just felt like you could fix it yourself. You could tough it out. You could get over it. And I really wished that we would've sought some counseling help to help us to, to move past it… You don't want to forget it, but how to handle it. How to, how to deal with it. W- what's- what's okay?... and we didn't, we just, um, kind of went about things. Uh, not pretending it didn't happen, but just didn't ha- ... Didn't deal with it. Didn't, um, you know ... I don't know how to explain it any better than that.

Guilt. One of the most powerful feelings and emotions shared by the participants

was guilt. Though the exact reasons for the feeling varied, all the participants shared

feelings of guilt.

Betty: I'm like, well I should have been there.

Dan: He's not here, how can we be ... How can we be excited about this?

An area of guilt surrounded the communication with the deceased student-athlete's

parents. Often times the participants were not able to be entirely and immediately

truthful with the parents.

    Carl: The relationship I had with the players obviously was close but it doesn't even, it doesn't even come close to, to being what a parents has with their child… I felt, I also felt somewhat guilty because I was told not [to] tell them [the boys' parents]…

    Betty: Almost like sad, um, kinda, like you know you lie to somebody and you know you're lying to their face… You get that like sinking stomach feeling like, oh shit, hopefully I don't get caught in this. You know, like that kinda feeling… just sick…

Nowhere is the notion of *in loco parentis* more evident than the college campus, and

nowhere on the campus is it more apparent than in athletics (Norton & Harper, 2007). A

coach is often looked at as the de facto parent for their student-athletes. For Betty and

Earl, the concept of in loco parentis was a real source of guilt.

    Betty: And as a coach… you take these kids on as part of your kids…. you promise the parents you're gonna protect them…I didn't do it... It was out of my control, but it was still just one of those things where, um, y-you feel like it's your responsibility.

    Earl: initially…as bad as I was feeling… I think it kicks in that these are- these are her parents, they have to- this has to be the, you know, the ultimate nightmare as a parent…. after that initial period I also- and I don't think there's anything wrong with saying it made me feel guilty, because her parents had allowed her to come to university from State… I think deep down I think all coaches, you know, you have that feeling of, um, that's your job to, you know, not only help them develop on and off the field, but also to look after them. And so I think, you know, that guilt feeling, ultimate let down that your daughter has come here, and she's been killed, you know, and- and I'm the head coach, uh, when that happened.

The circumstances and timing of *Dylan*'s death was a source of guilt for Dan. He blamed

himself for *Dylan*'s death for many years. As a parent would, he took responsibility for

Dylan's death.

    Dan: I guess it was just after the fact, years later … after he passed away and probably a good five years, it really impacted me negatively. It really affected me

because I go back to that time and could have I kept him in my office longer? Could I have given him more attention? I remember being busy with emails and phone calls while he was there. Probably didn't give him the attention that he deserved... That was the- the guilt that was with me for a long, long time... It probably took me a long time, a really, really long time, to handle that.

Ann's feelings of guilt regarded her leadership and role modeling for the players. She was concerned that she was saying the right things and leading in the right way.

Ann: I was wondering like h-have I been a bad example? That, 'cause I think they maybe need, would be better if they talk to somebody but I couldn't get them to. So I was, uh, feeling a little guilty about that…,w-w-we talked about it, we did the best we could internally.

For Betty and Dan, the healing process and moving forward was a new source of guilt. In Dan's case, moving pass his guilt was important to his healing.

Betty: Yeah, and it's, it's almost like I felt guilty when it wasn't at the forefront of my mind every day. So then [after]… four or five years…So it's like, it's life, you know. And I don't feel guilty about it anymore, but yeah, it was, there was a time there when I'm like well, should I be feeling guilty that I'm not focusing on this every day or constantly.

Dan: I was really guarded in my relationships with players. When I was at university, I mean those kids came over to our house for Thanksgiving. They were a part of our family. When I got out here, I think I was ... I really didn't want to become really, really attached with them, for the first two or three years. Um, and then that's when I started to understand that the guilt and the blaming myself was not real... That I needed to move past that. Then from that point forward, it made the situation way better.

Daily impact. All participants shared experiencing daily emotions and feelings from leading team and navigating their own personal grieving process. A common feeling conveyed by the participants was that the emotions and details for the leadership experience were always on their mind. Carl summarized this feeling for most of the participants, *"If you're honest, you, you, you're, you're always aware of what had happened. It was always in your mind"*.

Betty: But yeah, it's kinda weird how it's such a forefront of your mind and then all of a sudden just goes to the back. Like oh, that happened. You know, and but yeah, if somebody asked you about it, it's like plain as day. Like you know exactly what happened. You can relive every moment.(...) Perfect example of how I said time fades things, but the memories are are always there. Just heard the song "I can only imagine" and instant tears. It was one of Bea's favorite songs and the first time I heard it was at her funeral and every time I hear it, the tears come instantly.

Earl: still- still there with me on a daily basis and the players on a daily basis as well.

Dan: I struggle with that and reflecting back on this, the four years at university and this situation, um, there's no doubt it changed me, um, often times I've wondered if it changed me for the better, initially, until I was able to really deal with it... but it's still something I ... Still something I deal with for sure.

Carl: I think it affects all aspects of your life... it, it affects how you act and how you react to people in terms of situations. So certainly it did that. And it still does today. I mean, I still think about, on certain days, the days of the accident, you know, the anniversary of the accident, if that's the right way, way to put it, and around the holidays, um, the year and the day that those young men would have graduated from college, those are days that it really comes to the surface... but I would say I think about those two young men probably every day. And I've thought about them every day since, since their deaths. I would imagine that at some point of every day, it crosses my mind....Probably I imagine it will affect my life for the rest of my life.

Leadership Challenges

As participants led their teams following the unexpected death of a student-athlete, they faced many challenges. Many of these challenges were new and dynamic since none of the participants had ever led a team following the death of a student-athlete before. Sometimes these challenges diminished once they were addressed. Other times, the challenges were ongoing and needed constant attention and response.

New and dynamic challenges. All the participants' leadership challenges were uniquely their own, though they shared many similarities.

Carl: These guys have been through something that a-, as an 18, 19, 20, 21 year olds, you know, that no-, normally you don't have to deal with what they've dealt with.

Several of the participants mentioned the inconsistency of their team. As their

players worked through and dealt with their individual grief, the participants were faced

with a dynamic leadership challenge.

Betty: um, had a few times where just having a bad day.

Dan: some days were- were okay, and some days weren't.

Earl. I- I- I do remember this, it was a very inconsistent team. There were occasional days when they played really well, there were some days they were just so flat…and so you almost came to expect the, uh, the inconsistency as we- as we went through the season…. [Coach] "I can't- I- I can't practice today." I had that, or I had that multiple times throughout the season.

Dan: Nobody talked to each other about it. We were, you know, battling these thoughts and feelings that we had inside rather than just go play.

Carl: dealing with the emptiness that you're feeling, uh, uh, you know, as a person. So probably the biggest challenges making sure that they, that they move on, uh, best they could, that they kept on track and they moved on with their lives. And that they, um, they didn't let it affect them in such a way that it was gonna affect them negatively for maybe for the rest of their lives.

For Dan, the feelings and circumstances immediately following the memorial and funeral

services were in direct contrast to the season ahead.

Dan: Initially I think, it was good. Um, but it, it was a really, really difficult year.

As a sports team, activities would return to a new normal. This included what had

appeared before to be mundane activities like practice and games. Carl shared the impact

of and the importance of practice. Earl and Dan communicated about games.

Carl: … Playing and practice… for probably all of us became a good place to be… they could be together… they could be with their teammates who they knew supported them, but in the same sense… it was also something they loved to do…. it was a nice distraction for them… area where they could go be safe, be away from other people, be with their teammates and … be in a place where they weren't sitting there all by themselves just thinking about it.

Earl: ... and their games, let's go and enjoy the games, you know, but, you know, I think just by doing it that way, they behaved in a- in a- in a good way I think, or they- they had the idea of serving their teammates, honoring Erin on a- more on a daily basis, and then when the games came, I think it helped them. They just played and they relaxed.

Dan: We were, you know, battling these thoughts and feelings that we had inside rather than just go play.

Intercollegiate sports teams are made up of different ages and grade levels of players. Some will have known the deceased student-athlete well and others will be just joining the team. This presents some dynamic relationships that will exist on teams and between teammates, particularly with regard to the deceased student-athlete.

Carl: Obviously, So some of 'em were freshman who had known them for six weeks, and some of them were, um, kids who knew them for, had been their roommates for three years. So, you have such a different level of relationships...

Dan: Um, we had an older team, but yet we had some younger players that didn't know Dylan. And they didn't fit in. Um, and that ... And I, and I think that a lot of it had to do with us not handling the Dylan thing, very well.

Carl spoke that challenges with these relationships as the team moved into subsequent seasons where additional memorials were dedicated and events were held to honor *Cody* and *Cole*.

Carl: The new players coming in was kind of unique because there were certain, the dedication of the scoreboard, the dedication of the benches, different things that we would have to honor the, the two young men, the guys who were new to the team weren't even here. They didn't know them.   So, it was also you, it was kind of probably very weird for them to stand there and semi-grieve somebody who they never met in their life...

Ongoing challenges. After the participants navigated leading their team in the immediate season following the passing of their student-athlete, some on-going and previously unknown challenges connected to the death of their student-athlete presented themselves. The question was poised to the participants about how long the period of

recognizing and remembering the deceased student-athlete lasted. All the participants

made comments that the impacts of the unexpected death of their student-athlete last well

beyond the next season.

Carl: now obviously the next fall, to make sure that they still were okay…, some of them were still going through different stages of grief… making sure that they were okay. It, it was an ongoing, process for them and for us to make sure that everything was okay.

Betty: I think 40 years from now will still be there.

Ann: Um, certainly for that year and the year after, I was totally aware of it. Um, and we didn't talk about it a lot but we talked about it some. I would say, um, for, maybe, four years, a little bit, but the first two years, for sure.

Earl: Well, I mean … I would say six, seven years.

Dan: for a long time, you know, I would say six to eight years, people were a part, you know, of remembering him.

Carl: and it still goes on not formally. But it still goes on… again, the biggest time, it's probably like any, any other situation even if they weren't on an athletic team, their birthdays, the date of the accident, um, again, the date that they were supposed to graduate… it's marking a certain period or a certain anniversary in their, in the young men's lives or the family's lives…I imagine it will go on, um, you know, once, once the final player who played with those young men is, is gone, graduates and moves on and is no longer that the university, it will probably change some within the team…

Carl was the only coach to mention social media during the interview. This appears to be

directly influenced by the timing of the passing of his two student-athletes. For the other

participants, social media was not a topic.

Carl: I think with social media now, you know, you can see [remembrances and memories]… probably one of the reasons I do when I do go on Facebook, it's around one of those anniversaries, and, and to see what their pa-, how the parents were doing and to see what their parents might post on the Facebook page... So social media has probably changed some of that as well. Um, it makes it more visible and, you can see sort of how… what they are saying on those days.

Earl was the only one to mention the challenges moving forward regarding re-establishing a competitive environment within the team during the next several seasons after the initial season after. Earl describes the challenges that existed in the second season and beyond, after *Erin*'s murder.

> *Earl: Yeah, I mean, the ... uh, I would say, the group dynamics for the next season, a-and possibly the season after that, we were poor…. the [player] conversation we would sometimes get was a player feeling that, that either their coaches or teammates were not very supportive of them. And I think what had happened was we had obviously gone extreme to… just, focus on, make sure that the [players], you know, the kids are okay, type thing… I think it was almost like a rebound effect… they had been so used to just receiving support and the emphasis being solely on that, that when we kind of said "Okay, we, you know we wanna try and make sure that, you know, we-we have a better balance (support & competitiveness) now", it was, it was almost met with um, objection… because our players were in such a mode of accepting support and, you know… like no emphasis on competition hardly, that when we tried to reintegrate that into our program, some players actually took it like, "Oh my goodness," you know, "no one cares about us anymore."… it was a- it was an interesting dynamic… the incident affected our program for a long, long, long, long time.*

University Response and Reaction

There was a response and reaction from all the universities involved with these unexpected student-athlete deaths. Some of the university's responses were positive. While some of the university's responses presented challenges to the coach and their leadership. There is currently is no real blueprint for leading through the death of a student-athlete for individual universities beyond their own internal policies and procedures. All participants communicated that their university had dedicated or memorialized the student-athlete/s in some manner with a tree, a bench or plaque. Several participants shared that scholarship funds had been established in the name/s of the deceased student-athlete/s. All the participants shared their feelings and experiences with their university's response to the passing of their student-athletes.

Earl: I mean they were supportive, you know, kind of checking, you know, do you guys got everything that you need type thing…

Carl: so the administration was extremely supportive. the chancellor of the university at the time attended both funerals. They had a lot to deal with.

Earl shared a unique and hard observation about his university's response.

Earl: The athletic department one, I have kind of … bizarre memories, because our department, and I don't know if you experienced this, but I mean ER- Erin's- Erin just didn't die in an accident, she was shot and murdered… and I think administratively the department had two things, and whether they … would ever admit it or whatever… I'm not sure. One was obviously to make sure that they did the right things and looking after Erin's family, helping out the team and the players, but I also do think there was a- a [feeling] "This looks bad," … for the department … I think the administration, even though no one would say it to me or whatever, I think they, you know, in a sense wanted to make sure the department didn't look bad as well…[Additionally]… it just was a negative, uh, like- like definitely a little bit, um, I won't say blame, but, uh, [I was] held responsible to some degree, um, that, uh, this happened … and, uh, yeah, it wasn't just a tragedy, but it was a kind of a black eye for the department as well.

Helpful communication and support. All participants made significant statements about their universities communication and support. Participants comments ranged from grief counselors to supportive mentorship to logistic planning to academic support.

Ann: It would've been helpful if they would have, um, acknowledged that it might be difficult this year and we'll have your back… That would've just taken a little bit of stress off, um, knowing that there was, I … maybe there was someone there that I could've gone to if I needed to.

Betty: AD [athletic director] was good… as far as, you know, working with media and organizing stuff for the hospital with all the hospital… good organizing that for the kids and that support, you know, with the grief counselors and all that kind of stuff…. it helped just because I could focus on the kids…

Carl: Very good… several of them were at the hospital when I got there. They supported anything and everything that we wanted. Again, actually we didn't want nor need a whole lot, but they provided, they, the whole university community [and surviving players] provided support… They didn't have to be told, they offered.

Earl again offered a unique and interesting observation regarding the university support

and communication around planning for *Erin*'s on-campus memorial.

> *Earl: And so, initially I remember they had meetings like for the planning of her memorial service… they a- they asked me to sit in, and I remember the- sitting in on this and then saying, "Look, I can't sit in on this. Why am I sitting, you know, I probably should be helping the team. You guys are talking about, you know, of long each part of the service should be, what food's gonna be served and stuff like that." … it was kind of bizarre... It wasn't well thought out on their part, you know, they thought, "Well let's get the coach involved," but then not understanding that I don't wanna hear… her memorial service reduced to, you know, what food's served here, and how many people should be here and all the seating and all that sort of stuff.*

Participants were not asked specific questions about academics or their leadership

experiences in the academic area. Carl was the only participant to outline some of the

university's response regarding academics.

> *Carl: If these kids need, you know, to, to have extra time to finish an exam. It wasn't like any, any of the, um, professors were saying, no, you know, he has to take an exam the day of schedule because this is how it is...As you could imagine, it affected some of theirs, some of them academically. Some good students, obviously did not do as well that semester, but the university and the professors on the academic side were very helpful. If they needed to take an incomplete, if they needed to drop classes, um, whatever it was to help them get through it with the understanding and the hope that time would not erase it but time maybe would, um, enable them to handle it a little bit better.*

Carl continued as it related to the importance of student-athletes returning to participate

in their sport with their teammates.

> *Carl: So they had to get up the next day and go to class. They had to study, and, again, that's where the administration … and the professors were very helpful… I can't imagine what it's like as a 19-year-old to have your best friend [die] and then two days later you have to sit there and try to study your math or you know, write an English paper… Because obviously, you're gonna be very distracted and you're not gonna, you would assume, you're most likely not gonna have your best results…. I think playing soccer after that might be easier than, than studying and concentrating in class because not that you don't have to try to focus as a soccer player but … there's a lot of physicality involved in it versus you're sitting there trying to learn a math equation…*

Need for more communication and support. Several of the participants had communication recommendations for athletic administrators. When responding to a question about university support and communication, Dan offered a powerful perspective regarding the type of support and communication that would have been helpful for him during this leadership experience.

> *Dan: Yeah, I think that they'd said and did all the right things, in terms of wanting that counseling, and, uh, but I don't think that anybody really ... At no point did I have someone from across campus in the counseling office come down, sit at my ... Sit at my desk and say, "Hey, what do you need? Um, how can we help?" It was just more of the generic, you know, we're here, let us know… We didn't know how to ask for it. We didn't have anybody on the outside checking in to help or to see how things were going.… I wish that somebody would've come to my office and said, "Look, I know that you're trying but you guys need to get some, get some help." And at no point did that happen. I just think that everybody deals with it differently. Um, and I think it would've given each of us, um, some strategy or helped us with closure.… I didn't have anybody mentoring me. I didn't have anybody trying to help me through the process. I didn't know any better. You know?*

Ann provided a recommendation for administrators. More support for coaches and private communications.

> *Ann: I think something that would've been… helpful for administrators to know… it'd be nice if they didn't like try to be the, I'm here for you all the time, savior type thing to the players and come up and give them a hug all the time. That was totally different from before… maybe send a note once in a while or something saying, you know, not make it a public scene so everybody could appreciate that something was being done, but make it more of a private, type of messaging to players… "Is there anything you need?"*

Growth as a Leader

The experience of leading a sport team in the season following the unexpected death of a student-athlete was a powerful life shaping experience for all participants. The changes that they shared were both broad and specific. Some of the changes were related to their coaching behaviors.

Ann: Let 'em really know that I cared…

Betty: I don't sweat the small stuff anymore. Um, focus more on the important things…

Carl: We probably as coaches became kinder and gentler, I guess, is the best way to put it.

Whereas, some shifted their perspective about how they viewed game and coaching.

Carl: the wins and losses were, were certainly put into a perspective for me.

Dan: Constant reminder of how you really got to slow down and enjoy what's in front of you, 'cause I think as coach, you get caught up in the next game, the next game, the next game, you know?

Change in behavior. Participants discussed how the experience affected and

changed their coaching and leadership behaviors.

Ann: I think, I became much more in-tuned to the players feelings… started watching very closely for any emotional issues that might come up … I started really watching all mannerisms on and off the field, in and out of practice, in all situations. Mannerisms, facial expressions, et cetera, to find out where they were at and how they were feeling.

Carl: You know, you probably start thinking, you know what?… it probably made feel as though there was a responsibility on my part to make those practices and to make those games into a positive experience.

Earl: I think also you probably become a little more, a little bit more kind, a little more empathetic to other people's feelings or what they're going through. And you maybe go out of your way to be nicer to people.

Dan: … I'm a better listener and that this situation, if there's one thing, I'm a better listener. When a kid comes into my office, I put my computer down, or my laptop, I put the screen down. I'm present. So I'm a better listener. I'm more present, um, based on what happened with Dylan. But it took me years to get to that point.

Earl: I think more empathetic, you know, completely… I mean just to see the devastation that one night that incident… caused all these young people and it probably affects them even today… so definitely more empathetic…, some of the stuff we've talked about, you know, not talking about wins and losses and all that, I think that carries over,

we- we still don't do much of that… that probably is carried over from that time… we talked more about the daily- daily behaviors...

Change in perspective. Carl stated, *"I can [only] speak for me, was that it very quickly puts things into perspective. They quickly, 'cause as a coach, even as an adult, if any of us are truly adults, as, as an adult, you kind of deep down know, hey, this is just a game. You know, and you try to tell yourself that, whatever, but I think all of us get too carried away with, with winning is the most thing, et cetera, et cetera, so I think in some ways, certainly for me, it very quickly put things in perspective for me."* The experience leading a team through the unexpected death of a student-athlete challenged the perspective of participants; particularly related 'normal' coaching behaviors and dealing with adversity.

Carl: And so you only hope that on the other end of it, which both of these families have done, by the way… you just try to get, uh, in any, you try to get as much positive out of it as you possibly can. And both of those families did… and so I learned so much from them than they probably will ever get from me in terms of how well they handled the situation…. Watching them deal with it in the way they did, um, I guess helps me on a day-to-day, basis, uh, deal with the adversity that we all have to deal with, you know? … I now try to see the positive, if there is a positive in something that happened to me, and I also, it certainly puts it, again, it puts it in perspectives… I learned that having a positive reaction and having a positive outlook makes the difficult times certainly not easy, but makes it, it makes them easier

Dan: It was something that has challenged me the rest of my car- career. Um, to really make sure that I give my players the time that they deserve when they come to see me or pick up the phone to call me… We get so caught up in this business of all the stuff, the recruiting, the emails, the phone calls, all that stuff. It's just to serve me a reminder that we get into this because of the relationship you have with your players and, um, and it really ... You can't take it for granted.

Correlations of Sub-Themes to Transformational Leadership

It was clear from the participants' significant statements that their primary focus as leaders was leading their teams. All participants recognized the challenges they faced while leading following the unexpected death of their student athlete. The four I's (Idealized Influence, Individual Consideration, Inspirational Motivation & Intellectual Stimulation) identified by Bass and Riggio (2006) as components of the Transformational Leadership theory provided the framework for additional interview questions. This framework allowed the participants' significant statements about leading their team to be analyzed and reviewed within the context of Transformational Leadership.

Idealized Influence

Players look to their coaches for leadership. When leading a team, coaches willingly accept the responsibility to serve as a role model for their players and teams. Being in a position of leadership provides coaches the opportunity to influence their teams. Leaders who have a great deal of idealized influence are willing to take risks and are consistent rather than arbitrary (Bass & Riggio, 2006). All the participants recognized the example they set and acknowledged its potential influence. The participants wanted to be strong for their teams.

> *Carl: when I met with the players, again, I wanted to show them strength,*
>
> *Dan: I was strong in front of [them].*

The death of their student-athletes and the participants' emotional reaction to the circumstances left the participants feeling vulnerable.

> *Carl: I'm dealing with it myself and trying to help them deal with it. If there is, such a way to help them deal with it.*

Earl: Uh, unchartered waters for sure. In some ways it maybe made me feel, again, saying this for the first time as I'm just thinking it through, and it made me- made me feel closer to the team, to the players, and maybe in some ways it allowed them to feel closer to us as coaches… I'm a fairly demanding coach, I'm really straightforward and- and- but this was a narrative where I think the players could see he probably doesn't know what he's ta- talking about here, you know what I mean?

Role model. All the participants made statements to the interview question, in what ways, if any, did you strive to be a role model that season. Based on the participants' significant statements, it appears that being a role model, showing real emotion and demonstrating consistent behavior was an important aspect of their leadership experience.

Ann: One of the girls told me…"You know what? It was great that you were there. You're strong for us, but it's nice to see you have emotion too."

Betty: I felt like I had to be the parent because I have to take on this stuff [for the players]… [I] have to be strong for these kids because they can't do it right now. But I can't necessarily fix it. But try and be there an help them [the players] fix it.

Carl: Don't know … if I could say … that the accident led me to be more of a role model… I was very conscious of the fact that I wanted to be a very, a, a very strong support system for them. I wanted them to know that I was there for them…. I hope they knew that already, you know, prior to the accident. But I think I probably did want to make sure that they knew that, that I was there, if they just wanted to come and talk about this, if they wanted to come sit down and, and just cry… I certainly did want to make sure that they knew that, that we were support systems for them.

Earl: Maybe the coaches appear vulnerable and more human as well, because we were very open that we are really unsure about this, but we're just gonna try our best.

The challenge of being a role model was real. Dan shared the weight of his challenge and feelings.

Dan: I tried to be extremely strong on the outside and not show them any signs of weakness in my mind, or show them, um, that I was really having a difficult time emotionally with it. Um, I mean, he passed away on my birthday.

In an effort to be a role model, some participants adapted and adjusted their coaching

behaviors to fit the current circumstances. Earl mentioned the importance of consistency.

Ann: Yeah, I think I did. I tried to be a little bit more open…. I felt that it didn't really hurt that they saw my cry at the funeral… I thought it was okay that they knew that I was grieving… that they meant that much to me, the players... So I thought that, just allowing myself to [express my emotions], let them see me feel [sad] a little bit… was not a problem. So then they may-maybe felt that they could be able, be allowed to express themselves, as well.

Carl: I think one thing that I, I tried to do was to, um, uh, what's, what's a good way to put it? ... I wanted to handle it in a such a way that ... but I wanted to let them know that it was okay [to be emotional]...Uh, and I probably did get emotional in front of them…. I did that again without… my intent was not, okay, I'm gonna show these guys that it's okay to be emotional about this. But I also wanted to let them know that it was okay to, um, feel very, very sad about this.

Earl: I think consistency… Just making sure that every day, you know, it was a rollercoaster ride for them at ages 18 to 21, they'd lost their friend… so making sure every day being consistent in my behavior. Making sure I didn't overreact to things like a practice that wasn't great, or if a game wasn't great, or- or anything like that…The second thing I- I do recall is making sure I was really well prepared for all team meetings. So cognizant of not making just a flippant comment about something that could trigger some reaction from the players… more carefully typing out, writing down, comments, uh, that's gonna be talked about in team meetings and things like that, and then trying to be proactive and emphasize if I say this, will this cause a reaction this way? Will this cause them to think of Erin this way? Will this cause feelings of guilt? Or things like that. So I was just really cognizant of that as well.

Again, Dan shared the challenges of being a role model and taking risks to challenge the

players while navigating his own grief process.

Dan: I allowed the numbness because I didn't challenge them to, to get over it. Um, for the sake of, um, you know ... I- I probably ... If- if- if I could've gone back, I probably should've challenged 'em like, "Look, like, Dylan's not here and the way you're going about it is not, is not showing him, um ... Is not honoring what he, what he would've done for you."... I think I was scared to put that out there. Because I don't know how players would've reacted to it and I guess I didn't want to be viewed as using someone's death to get them to play better?

Risks. The Transformational Leadership theory under Idealized Influence talks about a leader's ability and willingness to take risks. The participants did not make many significant statements regarding risk. In fact, it appeared the concept of risk during the season following the unexpected death of a student-athlete might be less applicable then under a more normal coaching season. Further examining the concept of Risk, as it relates to coaching leadership behaviors would be important in future studies.

Betty: Uh, I wouldn't say...none that pop up, you know.

*Earl: I'm not- I'm not sure there were- there were a ton of- hon- honestly, I don't-
I don't know if there were a ton of risks, other than to encourage them to be as open as
possible...No, other than just straight honesty and trying to get them to honor Erin by
how they conducted themselves, um, but honestly, nothing else.*

Ann: I don't remember.

Individual Consideration

Transformational leaders pay special attention to each individual follower's needs for achievement and growth by acting as a coach or mentor (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Carl during his interviewed summed up the importance of Individual Consideration quite well. *Try to keep in mind as we are going through practices and games that these young men had been through maybe what would be one of the most traumatic experiences of their life. So, we made a conscious effort to, to check on 'em, to, you know, kind of make sure they're doing okay.*

Making everyone feel valued. When answering the question, "in what ways, if any, did you make all the players feel valued", the majority of the participants answered in the affirmative and communicated that this was their normal best practice behavior. They tried their best to make everyone feel valued.

Carl: I always tried to make sure that the young men who weren't getting a lot of playing time always knew that they were important.

Betty: I think that's one thing I've always done is try to make each kid feel important regardless of their, their role.

Earl: I [held] a lot of individual meetings.

Carl: I al-, always tried to make sure that those young men knew that they were important to us. And in the small things whether it be you just walk over in practice, kind of, you know, you're off, you pull the kid off to the side, "Hey, how are things going in school? How's your, and how's your dad?" Or whatever. You know, almost like I'm checking on you as a person not as, uh, not as a mid-fielder. You know?

Ann: I don't think that was any different than other times because I spent a lot of time on that, having them feel valued. I think that was pretty much the same. It was like, uh, we, this is your role, you need to do this for the team. I don't feel that was much different.

Earl: I do remember that was then a very much more on the kind of support, caregiving side to make sure the players are okay, because obviously at such a young age they don't have the life experiences to, and sometimes maturity, to deal, you know, to deal with these things, or and no one had ever obviously prepared them for that sort of stuff…. at that time it was more just to check in and make sure everyone was doing okay. And so just by meeting with them… talk how they could help their teammates… asking them to kind of serve their teammates even though they were feeling bad… getting them to understand the value, that's the most important thing they can do right now … and not how many minutes they're getting and things like that.

Dan: think it was like at the first point in my career I felt like that instead of standing up in front of them, I was, I was behind them … The roles were reversed. I became somebody that was going to do everything I could to make their experience the very best. Make them feel like they were appreciated… whereas before, I think it was maybe tough love? … I think it became the reverse. I think I loved them first and was tough on them at the end.

Betty: You know where you had a close relationship with her [as teammates and friends] so it's gonna affect you way different. Don't judge this person 'cause they're having a bad day and they lose it at practice and start crying hysterically. Let it be. Don't judge them. Everybody deals with these things different.

Carl shared a personal experience that guided his leadership with his team.

Carl: I remember telling them, you know, because I remember … not to put this on a personal level, my father died when I was 19 years old. And I remember the thing that probably bothered me the most as a 19 year-old were people … good meaning people, people who meant well, would sometimes tell me almost without meaning to, they were almost telling me how I should handle it… so I, what I tried to convey to the players was everyone's gonna react to this differently, and it's okay any way that you react… "Hey, it, it's okay to cry."

Mentoring the whole person. In athletics, coaches are responsible for the guiding their student-athletes on and off the field. Coaches are striving to build champions in the classroom, on the field and within each person. Moving beyond the field of play and guiding the players in their academic and personal lives is dynamic under normal circumstances. When faced with the leadership challenge of leading a team following the unexpected death of student-athlete, coaches would be faced with a new set of new leadership challenges and circumstances. All the participants spoke about navigating these challenges and circumstances.

Earl: Just a ton of emphasis on individual support. A lot of individual meetings, make sure players are okay … a lot of compassion, empathy … I'd say those were the biggest, uh, you know, the biggest things, um, throughout the season…. I remember specifically in the preseason telling the players how I was gonna try and approach it, so in other words not bring it up every game and stuff like that, but try and have it more long-term behavioral changes to honor Erin.

Betty: But it was interesting to see how each one dealt with grief different. You know, and so seeing what they needed. Some kids just wanted to come in and cry. They didn't want you to say anything. Some kids just wanted you to give them a hug. Some kids wanted to have a conversation and, you know, talk it out and wanted, you know, feedback, responses, those kind of things. So, just seeing what was gonna help each kid and help them through their grieving process… determine and figure out what each kid, what each kid needs and then how to help them… serve them, so to speak, you know, to be successful [in all areas of their life].

Ann: We had a counselor come in and, two different counselors come in and they were free to the players [and players] were free to talk to them. I found, however, that they, most of them [the players] chose not to. They didn't want to. They said, "If we

wanted to talk, we'll talk to the coaches and we'll talk to each other. We do not want to talk to an outside person." So it was pretty, it stayed in the team type thing.

Earl: So it was just- just kind of going into a practice and knowing that probably somebody is just gonna have an absolutely horrific practice today and, you know, meanwhile in a normal year it's very rare for that to happen.

For Dan, mentoring the whole person became a struggle through-out the season.

Dan: I think we were all so, um, preoccupied with honoring Dylan, that it became harder to, um, help each player with where they were at with him, but also with where they were at with other things in their life, you know? I mean life- life did go on and I think that, um, we tried too hard just to do what we thought as best for him and his family at the time… I think we all, um, forgot to take care of ourselves I guess.

Inspirational Motivation

Based on the number of participant significant statements and the intensity of the participant's comments, Inspirational Motivation clearly provided a framework for analyzing the behaviors and feelings of sport team coaches leading their teams following the unexpected death of a student-athlete. Motivation that inspires team members is an important aspect of coaching leadership during a season without an unexpected tragedy. All the participants demonstrated through their comments how important and impactful motivation was in the season following an unexpected student-athlete death.

Goals, mission and vision. Participants response to a question, 'in what ways, if any, did you adjust the goals, mission and vision' that season? Participant responses were both broad and specific regarding their goals, mission & vision re-adjustment. For some it was clearly a pre-mediated decision and for others, it was a decision that unfolded by necessity as their season unfolded. The goal of most NCAA intercollegiate programs is to win. It was clear through the interviews that the participants were all competitive and

driven coaches with high expectations. Adjusting their competitive goals and mission for

the season was not a decision taken lightly.

Betty: Yes and no. I mean some of the little things didn't bother me anymore. It, it wasn't that important, you know… I've always set, you know, obviously you got your season goals and your, your training plan and, you know, peaking and those things. So none of that changed at all whatsoever. But just some of the petty stuff the kids were talking about… I put a end to it right away.

Carl: I still wanted to win every game. I still wanted to, us to achieve as high as we could possible could… I guess hope would be the right way to phrase it. I really, really hoped that they would have some success on the field just because I felt like that would really help them to, um, to deal with it on a day-to-day basis… I wanted them to have success… so hopefully they could, they could have … a few bright spots along the way.

Ann: Yes. We had to, we had to change our goals a little bit… we talked about that at the beginning, this is what we would like to see, um, and we sort of didn't really talk about performance goals that year. We talked more about giving everything we could at the moment, stay in the process, which we still talk about. But we didn't talk about what we wanted to win the conference and all that type of stuff because we knew that… [we]had to lower the expectations a little bit because we were not the same team.

Earl: I think I- I decided on that in the summer, you know... it just seemed the right thing to do. I don't know what else, as it just seemed the right thing to do too. Now it doesn't mean that we like gave players a pass on the competitive side, 'cause we ta- I mean we practiced hard… it was a team that overachieved…. We just decided, let's not bother talking about wins and so on, but let's make sure that we do talk about practicing hard and competing. Just because we didn't talk about wins and losses, I mean they're competitive spirit, their sense of unity and purpose was amazing…. it's probably the only year in the entire career here that we put no emphasis at all on competition or winning games….We just talked about let's stick together, let's, uh, support each other, uh, let's play hard. I was very cognizant of not bringing up… the idea of Erin or Erin's death, or what Erin would've wanted as a gimmick… we've got a big game this weekend, so let's get- let's try and get the players fired up and talk about let's do it for Erin...

Motivational strategies. Inspiring and motivating individuals to aspire to reach

higher and dream big is a daily responsibility for coaches during every season. The stakes

are raised following the unexpected death of a student. Motivation is certainly required

to compete at an NCAA level. Now this required motivation to strive to perform well as

an elite NCAA athlete must be adapted to the present circumstances. Balancing the

responsibility to provide motivation and being respectful of the deceased student-athletes

was a leadership challenge for all participants. All participants spoke about their

motivational strategies, including how they honored and remembered their fallen

teammates.

Carl: I think, too, that the practices were almost a good place for them to be. And I think once you kind of get up and get into the competition part of it, they were, you know, whether they're playing, you know, just a scrimmage amongst themselves, they still were, they still were athletes, they still were motivated young men who wanted to win.

Dan had a difficult time with his communication and motivation with his team.

Dan: Yeah. No question, because that was the first year, I believe, we played in the League and the goal for us was to win the League. Um, and we- we- we were really bad. And it got to the point you could just see it unfold. I mean there was no ... Guys were going through the motions ... They were, they were certainly discouraged... Uh, I think they were, like some of them were seniors, that they knew their career was over. Um, I think it was really hard for them to, um, go out that way. Um, and we didn't fight. We- we- we just kind of let it happen. Um, we just kind of let it happen and, um, I mean this game's hard anyway. I mean sports are hard any way.

Honoring vs. playing for*.* The concept of Honoring vs. Play for was a follow-up

question that evolved organically throughout the interviews. Participants understood the

meaning behind the question. Were they leading their teams to 'win for' or to 'honor'

their deceased teammates? Earl summed up well the pressure that this winning for

message creates by stating, "*I hardly wanna be setting them up every single game*

saying, 'Let's do this for Erin,' and then we don't have success, and that makes them feel

even worse guilt, like they've let her down or her family down and things like that." All

participants voiced how they handled the concept of honoring their student-athlete/s.

Ann: To honor Amy…

Carl: I never wanted to, to put what happened to these families in the same light as winning or losing a soccer game… I never ever wanted to use these deaths as way, hey, you know, Cody would have done it differently, Cole would have done it differently or, hey, let's go win this one for them. Because again, I thought what happened went way beyond winning or losing a soccer game… one thing I didn't do was I never tried to use the deaths in such a way that … I think as coaches you're always looking for sources of external motivation, and I always made very sure that I, I never, ever put the two, I never tried to tie one into the other… I was very careful to never ever use these deaths as a motivation in terms of, hey, we gotta go win this game for Cody and Cole or Cole and Cody.

Earl put a particular focus on practice and daily living as it related to honoring *Erin*.

Earl: Yeah, we talked- yeah, we- we did talk about that, and we talked about not- not just playing, but practicing to honor Erin. Be the team… behave like she was as a teammate, you know, so super hardworking … big emphasis on competitive play … no excuses… being a supportive teammate, all those things. So we talked about that but not going into every game saying, "Let's win this for Erin."… Because I- I felt like if I did it in game setting, a couple of reasons. I didn't wanna come across as gimmicky or insincere… and then the second thing is … I had no idea how the team would do as well.

Dan: I think we did talk about playing to honor him... I think I was just really worried about challenging them that way, because I felt like it would be this continually brought up more and more… I guess I didn't want to be viewed as using someone's death to get them to play better.

Dan utilized some motivation strategies that were different from the strategies communicated by the other participants. He had *Dylan*'S number on all the practice jersey's and they hang a jersey in the dugout. Dan has reflected on these motivational and remembrance strategies. He shared some of his reflections.

Dan: Just to relive it every day. You know? They just felt like there would've been another way to honor him without having to see that number on the back of everybody's jersey every day. It just caused them to relive it each and every day… I think the biggest regret that I have about the situation is… we chose to honor him by having his number on the back of our, uh, fall practice jerseys, which, uh, if I could go back and change it, I wouldn't do that. I think it was too much, um, too much a reminder every single day… The season would've been dedicated to him by how we played though, not by having stuff in the dug out to remember him by, you know? Um, I definitely would've eliminated that and made more the focus on honoring him by the way we play.

Remembering. All participants spoke about finding ways to remember their

student-athletes that passed away.

     Ann: You know the sun, look at the sun. The sun will represent Amy. That's who's going to be with us at all times, everywhere we go. She's gonna be there. Yeah, they could look to the sun and know that, uh, Amy was with them.

     Earl: I think the players that were teammates of Erin at any point, so anyone that was on the Year team, they honored her until they graduated. You know, they, you know wore wristbands or motivational stuff, stayed in touch with her parents, um, came and talked to the coaches about it, certainly talked to their younger teammates about it.

     Ann: The poster, they had the three seniors and then they had Amy's glove in the picture. Which, um, most people probably wouldn't recognize but of course, since I knew what the plan was, and they asked permission, I'm like, "Of course." She goes, "Amy is always with us," I'm like, "I know."… it was like she is always still part of the program…

All participants shared that their teams took part in remembrance and dedication type

events, where the deceased student-athlete/s were memorialized. Earl spoke about the

challenges facing the team during remembrance events that were scheduled for *Erin*.

     Earl: I mean there was moments of honoring her before some of the different games and stuff like that as well, with her family back in town and so on. And those were tricky, in fact, I almost feel like as a team, whenever there was extra kind of honoring pregame stuff, whatever, I felt like the- the- this tendency for the group to play flat…I just felt like it made them so sad, you know, and like I said, and this may be different to some others, feelings of guilt, feelings of shame.

Dan echoed a similar message regarding the different remembrance events and the

challenges he faced.

     Dan: Um, and then so, he passes away right, in August, and then the season's not til the spring and yet we were still doing some things during the spring to honor him. There was a weekend we planted a tree. So it's just like time and time again, we were doing something to bring it back up to everybody, which was not healthy, I don't think… I think that we just continually reopened wounds with players that hadn't dealt with them. You know what I mean? People hadn't dealt with it.

Ann, Betty and Earl spoke about how they integrated remembering *Amy*, *Bea* and *Erin*

into their respective programs and create legacy for their program.

> *Ann: Well I felt that that was, great because we talk about once a Mascot, always a Mascot. We talk about once you're part of our family, you're always part of our family. And so, even though Amy wasn't physically there, she was still part of our family.*

> *Betty: I mean she [Bea] has this whole book of quotes. It's unbelievable. But the one that always stood out was like: "Everything will be okay in the end. If it's not okay, it's not the end". Well, it was the end for her, and so everything had to be okay. And we have to trust in that, and, you know, you know, move forward. And obviously, still mourn her and whatnot, but she had just a bunch of quotes. I still have them on my wall here, Bea's quotes... [I would] send them out via email or put them on their workouts for the week... you know, just little motivational quote type things, and I still do it 'til this day.*

> *Earl: Our team meeting room, it's called the Erin room... as soon as you go in, there's a large, huge photo of her in action, uh, along with a poem that she'd written about herself, so that's still there to some degree, and we make sure that every incoming player knows the story.*

Intellectual Stimulation

Transformational leaders encourage creativity, reframe adversity and seek new

solutions. Followers are encouraged to try new approaches, and their ideas are not

criticized because they differ from the leaders (Bass & Riggio, 2006). An unexpected

death of a student-athlete makes adversity very real. Coaches of intercollegiate teams are

constantly tasked with helping their players improve their skills and character.

Participants shared about the challenges they faced in the season following their student-

athletes death and some of the ways that they stimulated their student-athletes' minds.

Ann spoke about reframing her players view and perspective following *Amy*'s death.

"Life is short. You don't know what's gonna happen tomorrow so let's go for it."

Challenges with feedback. In response to the question about challenges with

feedback and getting players to move outside their comfort zones, there are some varied

response from the participants.

*Ann: Um, no, I don't feel that it was much different than it had been other
seasons. I thought they worked pretty hard, that whole type thing. I just felt they almost
did more, uh, getting out of their comfort zone because they had nothing to lose.*

*Carl: No, because I saw from the very first time we went back on the field as a
team, and there was a few days, but they actually had a couple of team practices where
the coaches were not there. They just went out and played.*

*Dan: Yeah, it was very difficult. Very difficult. Just that players were a lot, um,
less open to [feedback] ... It just seemed like you got on the bus after you won or lost and
it was just ... It was like you lost. [The players were] really afraid to, be excited about
playing together. Be excited about, um, winning and it was almost like it was just because
we didn't want to, um ... How can we, you know, be excited when we still don't have him,
you know? … He's not here... How can we be excited about this? I mean we went the
whole year kind of with that hard to get up to play... Very difficult to be excited about
playing baseball, without him with us.*

Earl provided a slightly different perspective on the challenges of offering feedback to his

players and helping them to improve. He shared that he would do this best, but he did not

have all the answers.

*Earl: I shouldn't say it was challenging to provide feedback. I don't feel that. I
felt like and I told them this, I said, "Girls, I don't have a manual for this for myself,"...
you know, I think as, you know, as coaches we, you know, we go through a licensing
system, we read articles, we take course, our educational degrees and our experiences
all help us, all put us on a path, you know, for how we're going to kind of run our
programs, uh, but I didn't have anything for that, and I told them that.*

Unique problem solving. Unique problem solving is not a foreign concept for

intercollegiate coaches. Intercollegiate coaches face adversity and trying circumstances

on a regular basis. However, the unexpected death of a student-athlete presents each

participant with new challenges. Participants spoke about some of the unique problem

solving they utilized as they guided their team through the season.

Earl: Unique, other than just to try and be open and honest, uh, with each other, with the coaches, and to respect how each player would handle things differently, but nothing, uh, no-, you know, nothing way off, other than, you know, maybe that preseason training camp going to a different venue. I was really aware of not being gimmicky.

Betty: But, uh, just having everybody respect each other, you know, over these next upcoming weeks. Because everybody does deal with grief and stress and things in a different way… so, don't judge somebody, you know, [with] how they're processing or how they're dealing with it…Some of you may not even talk. You might all of a sudden start talking to you and as their way of coping, you know. So just be respectful and, you know, listen to them and… I would say more or less just the... Everybody's different.

Ann: Uh, I think one thing I talked more about was, how important it was to appreciate the moment. So I really focused on, I think I focused on that a lot more since then just because you never know when it can end. You never know if you're gonna have the same group of people together again. So let's appreciate what we have.

Adhering to the final step in Colaizzi's (1978) analysis method, prior to being

finalized the essence of the experience from the study was emailed to the participants for

review. Participants reviewed the description developed from the findings to ensure the

researcher had captured the essence of their experience. Suggestions or

recommendations regarding the essence of the experience from participants were

integrated. The following section provides a thick rich structural and textural description

as the researcher's sincere attempt to authentically capture this essence of the experience

of an NCAA Division I or II sport team coach leading their team through the unexpected

death of a student-athlete.

Essence of Experience

Suddenly and without warning, a coach's world is rocked by news that will

change their life and the direction of their team's season. As the words delivering the

news of an accident, murder, or tragic circumstance are being heard, feelings of shock and panic begin to well-up. As the incomprehensible news is unwrapped, a new reality sets in. An unchartered leadership journey begins.

This was the first time any of the coaches in this study had experienced the death of a student-athlete. What follows is my best effort to accurately and sensitively portray the essence of the experiences of these coaches, who led their teams following the unexpected death of a student-athlete. Not all of the coaches experienced all of these things, but unless specifically stated, when "coaches" is used, this designates more than one coach and often refers to most of them.

A complex array of emotions are experienced as the leadership journey begins to unfold. The coaches are called on to help their teams and student-athletes. They focus on their team first and their own grief and healing process second. There is a tremendous sense of devastation and pain for the lost life. This pain encompasses the team and extends to the deceased student-athlete's parents. In some cases, coaches had to communicate with the student-athlete's parents about the accident. This communication was filled with feelings of dishonesty and sadness. Often coaches were unable to share all the details they knew with the student-athlete's parents. At this point, the coaches' team was also in a state of disbelief and sadness as they first learned of the accident, murder, or tragic circumstance.

Coaches felt a real sense of responsibility for the death of their student-athlete. Guilt for all the coaches arose from this sense of responsibility. Feelings of guilt around the thoughts or belief that somehow the coach could have prevented the student-athlete's

death. Strong feelings of guilt existed around the thought that the coach had failed in the promise to the student-athlete's parents to look after and take care of a son or daughter. These feelings of guilt remained for some coaches as the healing process moved forward. Coaches shared that guilt re-surfaced as time passed and they started to move forward. They felt guilty about not having the student-athlete or their passing at the forefront of their mind.

The events and services celebrating a life lost surfaced new and different emotions. These events made the loss of a teammate and student-athlete *"real"*. Seeing the casket, sometimes open and sometimes closed, was another reminder of the loss and source of sadness. The coaches had to help their teams grieve while experiencing the formal celebrations of life that typically follow death. Bus and plane rides usually reserved for away competitions were replaced with rides to funerals. Funeral speeches and tributes took the place of pregame talks and halftime speeches. Tears of sadness and hugs offered in comfort for the loss supplanted shouts of excitement and high-fives celebrating victory. Coaches faced sadness and devastation internally as they were trying to be strong for those around them.

Feelings of uncertainty were common among the coaches. Typically, a coach has answers and provides direction. In face of the unexpected death, the coaches had no previous experience from which to draw. Their traditional academic studies and coach education courses offered little assistance. Coaches felt isolated and fearful due to typically being the one who has the answer and knows the direction. Having no *"map"*

or guidebook had some coaches worrying about saying the wrong thing. Coaches did not want their words or actions to affect their teams or individuals in a negative way.

Even with this uncertainty about what to say, coaches were willing to express their emotions in front of their team and players. It was an authentic expression of emotion and feelings from the coach, never a contrived or false expression to elicit a response from their teams. Coaches acknowledged the role-modeling aspect of being vulnerable and real with their emotions. According to coaches, this role modeling had a positive impact on their team. It is okay for the unexpected death of a student-athlete to hurt and for survivors to feel sad.

Coaches understand that teams and season have a normal lifecycle. Seasons are impermanent and fleeting. They unfold and unwind. Players move on and teams move forward. The death of a team member fractures this illusion of normalcy. Things become permanent very fast. Quietly, there is an understanding that nothing will be the same and everything will remain the unchanged. Games will be competed. Practices planned and executed. The leadership journey proceeds towards discovering a new normal.

There was a daily impact of emotion as the coach's and the team's new normal unfolds. Student-athletes brought a level of unpredictability and intensity of emotion to the daily challenges of coaching. There are some good days and some bad days. Some days players could practice and compete appropriately and some days they could not. Each individual player was navigating his or her own grief process. Some days this outwardly affected one team member and some days it affected others. During this time

of helping their teams, coaches reported being strong for their team and then some days getting in the car at the end of the day and *"breaking down."*

Though coaches shared deep feelings of pain and devastation, no coach was paralyzed and unable to lead their team. Coaches expressed words of significant struggle and difficult times, accompanied by a real fortitude and willingness to embrace the challenge accompanying the journey of leading their team forward.

A responsibility of a coach is to help motivate and inspire their team. Though, it may shift the focus of a coaches' motivation and inspiration, the unexpected death of a student-athlete does not negate this responsibility. All coaches shared that their goals and mission for their season were impacted by the death of their student-athlete. In some cases, the coaches adjusted their seasonal goals and mission in response. *"We weren't the same team."* *"I was concerned we might not be very good."*

Coaches had a keen awareness regarding their motivational methods. All communicated their sensitivity to ever being perceived as using the death to motivate their teams. The death was bigger than wins and losses. Coaches were careful not to be gimmicky with their motivation, and in some cases, took great care to construct their team talks in advance to be sure not to trigger a negative response or reaction from their student-athletes.

The concept of 'playing to honor' the deceased teammate was consistent across coaches' experiences. The coaches focused their team's efforts on 'playing in honor of' their deceased teammate as opposed to 'playing for' their deceased teammate. Coaches did not want their teams to feel like they had to compete with the extra burden of winning

for the deceased or his or her family. This placed too much risk on the game as another source of negative emotion in the event of a loss. Coaches encouraged their teams to honor their fallen teammate through their daily efforts, attitudes, and actions.

Coaches created opportunities for their teams to remember their fallen teammate. Teams planted trees, held moments of silence, established memorials and scholarship funds and dedicated team-rooms, benches, and scoreboards. For most teams, these were positive sources of healing and remembering. However, for one coach, the decision to remember their fallen teammate with his number on their practice jerseys proved to be overwhelming. The constant daily reminder of the loss was too much for the coach's team.

All coaches were committed to helping their players heal and *"make sure that it didn't negatively impact the rest of their lives."* Few coaches communicated how they dealt with their own individual healing and grief process. Their comments were team focused. For many of the coaches' teams, the unexpected loss of a teammate and the circumstances surrounding the death might have been their most devastating life experience to date. There was an awareness from some coaches that all of their players would be impacted differently by the unexpected death of a teammate. Everyone was going to process his or her grief differently. Several coaches encouraged their teams to be respectful and non-judgmental to their teammates. Compassion, respect, patience, and empathy were required daily from coaches and teammates.

For the coaches, their university said and did the right things. Administrators and Athletic Directors were present and helpful with organizing and coordinating the

logistics. The death of a student or a student-athlete is a complicated affair for a campus and athletic departments. Coaches shared about the supportive nature of the faculty and campus community. One university recognized that support, patience, and time might aid with the healing process of the student-athletes.

However, several coaches expressed frustration and a bit of confusion at their university's and Athletic Administrators' responses. A university and their Athletic Department was worried about how the unexpected death might make them look publicly. Some athletic administrators "*acted like it never happened.*" One coach felt, that even though his university did not specifically express it, they held him somewhat accountable for the student-athlete death.

All Universities made counselor support available for individuals and teams, if requested or needed. One coach expressed concern that no administrator really ever came to check-on his team to see if help was actually needed. They had needed help and did not know how to ask. Few Athletic Directors acknowledged that the season following the unexpected death of the student-athlete was going to be difficult and offered an extra gesture of support.

The unexpected loss of a student-athlete was a painful life shaping experience for the coaches. Several coaches communicated that prior to our interview they had never spoken about their leadership experience in this depth before. "*Honestly, never discussed this with anyone else, except maybe my wife.*" Their leadership experiences changed these coaches. Innocence was lost for both players and coaches. It had always been just a game and was suddenly so much more. Leading their team following the unexpected

death of a student-athlete influenced both their coaching behaviors and perspective. The passing of their student-athlete humanized their leadership journey.

Winning and losing were quickly put in perspective for the coaches. Winning and losing became less important. The typical *'focus on the next game'* or next result approach changed. Some coaches' perspective shifted to a renewed focus on relationships with their players. Additional coaches worked to find the core of the student-athlete experience. Practicing and competing should be a challenging and yet a joyful experience.

Coaches' coaching behaviors also changed. They focused more on player's body language. Coaches shifted their focus to foundational daily behaviors and away from getting results. Coaches put away their computers and they listened more attentively to their players. Coaches directed more of their focus to the student-athletes and their experience.

For many years, coaches continued to face challenges that surfaced from the unexpected death of their student-athlete. For some coaches, their leadership journey extended for six or seven years beyond the initial season following the death of their student-athlete. Time has passed for the coaches, yet, all coaches still think about the student-athletes they lost. For some, it is almost daily. Unexpectedly, losing a student-athlete and leading a team through the season that follows appears to be a profoundly and uniquely challenging leadership experience. It was the hardest season and *"it is something that will impact the rest of my life."*

Conclusion

This chapter described the essence of the leadership experience for five NCAA Division I or II sport team coaches in the season following the unexpected death of a student-athlete and part of my process as a novice phenomenological researcher. The reflexive journal maintained throughout the study provided important bracketing opportunities and allowed me to view the phenomenon again through the stories and experiences of the participant coaches. Through the words of the participant coaches, their lived leadership experience during tragic times emerged. The four themes that emerged were Emotion, Leadership Challenges, Growth a Leader and University Reaction and Response. Each participant coach's journey was an unchartered course full of challenging twists and turns, emotional highs and lows, powerful and inspiring intensity and an uncertain end-point. In addition to the emergent themes, Bass and Riggio's (2006) four components of the Transformational Leadership theory of Idealized Influence, Individual Consideration, Inspirational Motivation and Intellectual Stimulation were applied as a framework to further explore the leadership phenomenon of leading following the unexpected death of a student-athlete. The participant coaches' narrative interviews confirmed the applicability of these four components of the Transformational Leadership theory to crisis leadership and coaching leadership, while revealing new details and sub-themes regarding these established components. The leadership journey of these participant coaches provided new insights into the experience of sport team coaches with a credible foundation from which to develop appropriate recommendations and action strategies.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

This research study marked an initial step in describing the lived experience of five NCAA Division I or II sport team coaches, related to the components of Transformational Leadership, leading their teams following the unexpected death of a student-athlete. No research to date has focused on this leadership phenomenon. This chapter will reflect on the findings. Practical recommendations and strategies for NCAA Coaches and Athletic Administrators will be provided. This chapter will include an assessment of this study's strengths and limitations and suggestions for future research.

Recommendations for Practice

Intercollegiate Sport-team Coaches

This research study suggests the topic of coaching and leading a team following the unexpected death of a student-athlete is not covered in a coach's traditional academic studies nor in their coaching education. This research supports the need for continuing education and faculty professional development related to coaching and leading a team following a crisis and in particular the unexpected death of a student-athlete. Conversations are important between sport-team coaches and athletic administrators about a plan of action in the event of a crisis including the unexpected death of a student-athlete.

Facing the unexpected death of a student-athlete and the circumstances that follow likely will be one of the most challenging leadership and coaching experiences for an intercollegiate head coach. College and being a student-athlete is supposed to be

about learning experiences through competing in your sport at the NCAA level and innocuous yet character shaping life lessons. Then suddenly it is not. It is about so much more. If an intercollegiate coach finds themselves in the need of help and suggestions following the unexpected death of a student-athlete, they will not have time to read and dig through this entire study. They will need clear and concise information. Based on the research study, below are ten simple and easy to follow recommendations and action strategies for coaches following the unexpected death of a student-athlete.

1. Be real. Your emotion is okay. Being vulnerable is important. Acknowledge that you might not have all the answers. Your players will respect it and appreciate it.

2. Focus on your team and the individuals. Allow administrators and those who want to help plan logistics and details. The mundane planning of 'events' may be comforting and predictable to shift attention, if even for a second. Focus on your people and create the best environment possible. They need you.

3. Emotion from players is the normal. It is supposed to hurt. There will be good days and bad days. Have conversations with your players acknowledging this fact.

4. Everyone is going to be affected differently. Much like an earthquake radiating out from its epicenter. Here is the unpredictable part. You will not be sure how anyone person may be impacted. Recognize and share this with your team. Everyone will handle her or his grief differently. Suspend judgement. Offer support and compassion only.

5. Prepare for the inconsistency. As players navigate their healing process, inconsistency from players and your team may be present. Some days players

might not be able to practice or compete in a game properly. Some days they may not be able to be around the team. Be supportive and remember to take care of the whole person.

6. Be respectful with your motivation. Research would suggest that 'playing in honor of' as opposed to 'playing for' is the best plan action. Extra emotional pressure and risk exist in playing for or winning this game for insert name. You don't want to lose a game and have your team feeling that they have let everyone down. Be careful with remembrance items and symbols that have the players focus on the missing player every day. Numbers on practice shirts, jersey hang-up on multiple occasions, etc. have to be carefully considered. Create space of both healing and remembrance.

7. No gimmicks. Do not invoke the memory of your deceased student-athlete in an effort to win a game or improve intensity. Winning and losing are less important now. Focus your motivation and instruction on things that are within the players' direct control. The research suggests a plan forward may be to focus specifically on Practice and foundational daily behaviors. Focus on Practice behaviors and attitudes needed for development and on being a good teammate. Place the focus on Practice and then allow the players to compete during Games with freedom.

8. Remembering is good. Memorials and scholarship funds dedicated to remember and honor deceased student-athletes are typical and part of the healing process. Creating ways of never forgetting and remembering are positives

9. Getting professional counseling help is okay for you and your team. Be courageous and ask for it. Sometimes people will not know how to ask for help. It is okay. Asking for help could include reaching out to professional counselors to ask about healing strategies and hints for you and your team. As you focus on your team, remember to take care of yourself. You are important too!

10. The healing process takes time. You, your players and your program will need time to heal and move forward. The challenges will last beyond the first season.

Athletic and University Administrators

Intercollegiate coaches and athletic administrators may not recognize the prevalence of college student death. This research reported varying athletic administrative responses and reactions following the unexpected death of a student-athlete. All Universities and their Athletic Administrators provided a mainly supportive response. Athletic Administrators were present and available following the unexpected student-athlete death. They said and did the right things. Most athletic departments made counselors available for those that needed them. Assisting with the logistics of the unexpected death included help coordinating press conferences, memorial events, funeral transportation, etc. This assistance was important for coaches. It allowed them to focus on their teams and players. Campus memorials or scholarship funds dedicated in remembrance of the deceased student-athlete are appropriate and appear based on the research to be the normal.

The challenges presented when leading an NCAA sports team following the unexpected death are unique and may warrant additional campus or athletic department

policies and/or procedures targeting sport team coaches and their student-athletes.

Athletic Administrators should investigate existing campus and athletic department

policies, if not already addressed, to seek inclusion of appropriate additions related to

student-athlete death. Based on the findings from this study, some next level

recommendations and action strategies for Athletic Administrators are outlined below.

Following the unexpected death of a student-athlete, assign a mentor to the sport-

team head coach. This person would not be the coach's sport supervisor or administrator.

Mentors would not replace or serve in a role of a professional counselor. The mentor

would serve as an unbiased advocate to check-in with the coach to see how their doing

and to help talk through team coaching and leadership challenges. An athletic director

emeritus or a retired coach might serve well in this mentorship role.

Professional counselors are critical and important part of a healthy healing

process. Athletic Administrators should be prepared for the scenarios in which

coaches/teams ask for help and for those that do not request help. A persona of 'toughing

it out' or 'I can get over it', exists in elite athletics. Learning to respond positively to

adversity is often an important skill in becoming an elite athlete or coach. Athletic

Administrators need to find ways to make counselors more than available; understanding

that required is a very difficult concept to enforce and continue respecting a healthy

grieving process. A suggestion might be to establish strategy conversations between

coaches and counselors to discuss the strategies and hints regarding healing. Most

coaches love to talk strategy and always want to help their teams.

Additionally, athletic administrators need to acknowledge and recognize that there will be an on-going impact for student-athletes and coaches following the unexpected death of a student-athlete. This process could take many years. As some of the research suggested, the impact could last for as many as six or seven years. Appreciating the lasting and dynamic impact of the phenomenon is important for two reasons. First, to help the people in the program heal. This includes the surviving student-athletes and coaches. Second, for the program itself to heal and move forward as an elite athletic program.

Athletic administrators need to provide coaches additional support and words of support about both the challenges and season ahead. Based on the research, the simple acts, of letting their coach know that the athletic administrators have their back and acknowledging that the season ahead may be difficult, are powerful messages of support for sport-team coaches. The more sincere and better timed these messages the more impactful they will be for the coaches and teams.

Campus wide academic support and services should be provided. This goes beyond the traditional level of academic support provided for student-athletes. Athletic administrators need to work to ensure that professors and instructors are supportive of the student-athletes as they navigate the experience of losing a teammate and friend. There are unique academic challenges of being a student-athlete. The additional responsibilities of being a student-athlete such as additional time-demands for sport participation, pressures from representing the University in a public domain, missing class, making-up tests and extended deadlines make up some of these challenges. Some of these student-

athlete (academic and athletic) challenges will be compounded and compressed as an individual works through her or his grief process. Time will not erase the loss of a teammate or the feelings and emotions, but the hope would be that time might make it a little better. The additional responsibilities of being a student-athlete should acknowledged and recognized by Athletic Administrators and Universities as their institutional bereavement policies and procedures are developed.

Future Research

This dissertation study began the investigation into the phenomenon of leading an NCAA sports team, related to the components of Transformational Leadership, following the unexpected death of a student-athlete. Utilizing components of Transformational Leadership identified by Bass and Riggio (2006) as an investigative framework, the study expanded on gaps in the literature. Although, this study filled some gaps in the literature, these findings would suggest more research and investigation is needed to further understanding of this leadership phenomenon and the applicability of the Transformational Leadership theory (Bass, 1985) to coaching leadership.

The first of many potential research questions concerns the prevalence rates of student-athletes deaths across the NCAA. A better understanding should be gained of how regularly NCAA coaches face the leadership challenges of leading following an unexpected student-athlete death. This research suggests that student-athlete deaths are not isolated incidents and gaining a better understanding on prevalence rates of student-athlete deaths could help shape the understanding of this leadership phenomenon.

Furthermore, given that this was the first time the phenomenon of an NCAA sport team coach leading their team following an unexpected death was investigated further substantiation of the methods, analysis and findings is warranted.   Quantitative studies, of sport team coaches who have experienced this leadership phenomenon, could be conducted to examine the analysis themes and sub themes utilized within this dissertation to form the essence of the experience. Another potential quantitative study could be a survey through the NCAA of Division I coaches to examine applicability of the analysis themes and sub themes to significant tragic events.

Additional studies on leading a team following the unexpected death of a student-athlete should be conducted with an expanded participant pool and examining data for gender differences. Potential gender differences could include the overall experience with the phenomenon and the specific leadership experience related to both the gender of the head coach and the gender to the team being led.   Data from this study showed some curious trends. The present study sample size was not large or inclusive enough to draw conclusions or report them as themes or sub-themes.

Furthermore, qualitative studies with refined research questions could continue investigating this phenomenon. Refined questions could include targeted questions about specific coaching and leadership areas (e.g., What were practice/games like without them?, What were academic challenges for your athletes?, How did social media influence your leadership with your team?, etc.) to drill further down into understanding the leadership experience.   Another area of potential qualitative study and inquiry would be to investigate the leadership and coaching experiences of NCAA assistant coaches

helping a team following the unexpected death of a student-athlete. Longitudinal studies of coaches and sport teams programs could be conducted to understand the impact of a student-athlete death over a longer period on both sport team coaches and the sport team programs.

This study continued to examine Transformational Leadership as a valid construct and framework for investigation into coaching and coaching leadership. The analysis and findings from this dissertation supported the continued inclusion of Transformational Leadership as a lens through which to examine both the phenomenon of leading a sports-team following the unexpected death of a student-athlete and coaching leadership in general.   For investigations into the phenomenon of leading a sports-team following the unexpected death of a student-athlete. Transformational Leadership inquiry areas could be expanded beyond the 4 I's (Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, Idealized Influence, Individual Consideration) to include additional elements of Bass and Avolio's (1990) *Full Range Leadership Model*, mainly Contingent Rewards. Finally, gaining an appreciation of the student-athlete's perspective on their coaches' leadership could be important. After the unexpected death of a student-athlete and following the next season, the Transformational Leadership construct could be utilized as a basis to examine coaches' leadership behaviors from the perspective of the student-athletes.

Strengths and Limitations

This study has several strengths. Namely, the courageous participation from five NCAA Division I or II sport team coaches. The sport team coaches from across the

United States openly shared their stories regarding their leadership and coaching

experience following the unexpected death of a student-athlete. Their stories were

emotional and intensely personal. Most had not spoken about their leadership

experiences prior to the interview. Their narratives provided the foundation from which

to begin the investigation into this coaching and leadership phenomenon. The participants

understood that sharing their stories and contributing to this study might help coaches and

athletic administrators into the future.

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, there appeared to be some barriers to

recruitment. Participants were solicited through email. This could have been perceived as

too impersonal given the nature of the topic. Originally, a sample size of six participants

was sought as identified in the IRB proposal. The outlined solicitation methods provided

five participants. Though some communication existed with additional participants, no

further participants could be confirmed for participation.

My personal and experiential knowledge of this phenomenon was likely both a

strength and limitation with this study. I was passionate to complete this study and hear

stories from others with whom I share an experience. There was a strong motivation to

help others navigate this phenomenon and its challenges in the future. Research

participants were aware that I had gone through a similar experience. This likely aided in

their comfort level in participating in study. Common experiences can create a

perception of comfort. However, the knowledge, that we shared similar experiences,

might have limited the depth of some of their answers or resulted in 'assuming' that, as a

researcher I already knew. The phrase, *"as you know"* showed up periodically during the interview in the participants' statements.

Participants were not pre-screened for their understanding of Transformational Leadership. This lack of pre-existing knowledge about the Transformational Leadership theory and its components enhanced the participants' significant statements. Participant responses to the interview questions were clearly regarding their experiences and not an attempt to appear knowledgeable about Transformational Leadership.

Additionally, despite my attempts at bracketing through my reflexive journal, there was likely some researcher bias. This bias could have been subtle and relatively unknown. Two places it could have surfaced was in the follow-up questions during the interviews and in the coding of significant statements. Areas or topics where I might have had a strong emotional response to the interview or a memory could have been an area of extra focus. Following Colaizzi's (1978) systematic phenomenological analysis method and returning the data to the participants for validation prior to finalizing worked to further reduce researcher bias.

Closing Words

This research study begins to address the gaps in the literature as it relates to examining actual leadership behaviors utilized during a time of crisis in sport team leadership and coaching. There appears to be a growing interest in researching transformational leadership within the sports and athletics field. This study continued to confirm Transformational Leadership as a valid framework to examine both crisis leadership and coaching leadership behaviors in sports. The study participants shared

their intensely emotional and personal leadership experiences of leading and coaching

their teams during a time of crisis. This study created a better understanding of the

phenomenon of a sport team coach leading their teams following the unexpected death of

a student-athlete, while providing behavioral insights and strategies for coaches and

athletic administrators to utilize in the future. This study brings attention to an area of

coaching leadership that had not been previously investigated.

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APPENDIX A

Name:_____   **Date:**_____

Phone #:_____   **Location:**_____

Interview Script (revised 12.18.2017)

Hello, _____! Thank you very much for taking my call & agreeing to participate in my study. I am looking forward to our conversation and learning more about your leadership experiences.

Here is the general plan for our plan today. First, a few general demographic questions. Then some questions about your leadership experience following the passing of your student-athlete. Our call should take about 1 hour.

Following our conversation, you'll be provided a copy of the interview transcript and able to check for accuracy and correct any misrepresentations.

Before we begin, do you have any questions _____ . Okay! Let's get rolling!

Interview Question

Demographic Questions

1. Age / Gender

2. Years Coaching overall & at intercollegiate level

3. Years at school when crisis occurred &

4. How long has it been since the passing of your student athlete?

5. Highest Earned Educational Degree

Are you okay to continue on to next set of questions, again focusing on the season following the passing of your student athlete?

Primary Interview Questions

1. Please share your story? What happened? (Asked to build background, establish

    trust and create shared language)

Are you okay to continue to the next question?

2. What was it like for you to lead and coach your team in the season following the

    death of a student-athlete?

<div align="center">

Specific Transformational Leadership questions.
Specifics title & category will not be shared with participants.

</div>

Individual consideration

1. In what ways, if any, did you make all your players feel valued regardless of their

    on-field role?

2. What, if any, were the challenges in mentoring the student-athlete as a 'whole

    person' and recognizing their individual needs?

Intellectual stimulation

1. Was it challenging to provide feedback and get individual players and the team

    outside their comfort zone? If so, what were some of the challenges?

2. In what ways, if any, did you encourage creativity and unique problem solving

    with your players and team?

Idealized influence

1. What, if any, were the risks you took during that season?

2. In what ways, if any, did you strive to be a role model for your players and team?

Inspirational motivation

1. What, if any, were the specific motivational strategies you utilized during that season? (play for / honor of)

2. Were your goals, mission and/or vision for the season impacted by the unexpected death? If so, how?

Are you okay to continue on the next question?

3. How have you grown as a coach & leader as a result of leading your team following the death of a student-athlete?

Last couple of questions

4. Anything else you'd like to share that I haven't asked about?

5. Do you know any other head coaches who've experienced leading their team following the death of a student-athlete?

<u>Conclusion & Next Steps</u>
That concludes our interview questions. I am grateful that you shared your story and experiences today. Your answers and story will be very helpful! Thank you!

Here's the next steps. As previously mentioned, you will be provided a copy of our conversation to review. Please read the interview and check for accuracy. You'll be able to let me know if there are any misrepresentations that need to be corrected. Are you comfortable and clear about that process?

Then near the end of the study, I will be reaching out to you one more time. You will be provided an opportunity to review and comment on the findings of the study.

I really appreciate your continued assistance and help!

Additionally, following this conversation, I will be again emailing the counseling services form for your reference.

Any questions?

<u>Thank you!</u>
Thank you so much for your help today! Much appreciated. If there are any questions that arise for you regarding this study, please reach out. I am happy to help!

We'll be in touch soon!

Thanks again!

APPENDIX B

General follow-up strategies/questions

1. Could you tell me more about the story and/or that detail you just shared?

2. Could you help me understand (what, where, when, why, how)?

3. Could you help me make sure I'm painting the correct picture in my head; please expand on that thought?

4. How did you respond to that? What were your actions, attitudes and/or feelings?