Spring 2015

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Recommended Citation
Roorda, A.C., Czech, D.R., Harris, B.S., Todd, S.Y., & Burdette, G.P. (2015). An examination between high and low optimistic NCAA Division I student-athletes' perceptions of preferred leadership behavior in sport: a qualitative investigation.

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An Examination Between High and Low Optimistic NCAA Division I Student-Athletes' Perceptions of Preferred Leadership Behavior in Sport: A Qualitative Investigation

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AN EXAMINATION BETWEEN HIGH AND LOW OPTIMISTIC NCAA DIVISION I STUDENT-ATHLETES' PERCEPTIONS OF PREFERRED LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOR IN SPORT: A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION

by

ALEXANDER C. ROORDA

(Under the direction of Daniel R. Czech)

ABSTRACT

Numerous researchers have examined preferred sport leadership behaviors from both the coach and athlete perspectives (Beam, Serwatka, & Wilson, 2004; Chelladurai, & Carron, 1983; Freakley, Czech, Harris, & Burdette, 2012; Turman, 2013; Weinburg, & Gould, 2010). However, there is limited research in student-athlete personality dispositions and how those might influence student-athlete perceptions of preferred leadership behaviors. The purpose of the present study was to examine views of leadership in light of certain personality dispositions. This research examined the potential influence of optimism (Abramson, et al, 2000) on qualitative descriptions of preferred leadership behaviors using the Revised Leadership Scale for Sport (Zhang, & Jensen, 1998) to structure the interview questions. 106 NCAA Division I student-athletes in a southeastern university completed the Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R), the results of which were split into three groups: *low optimists, middle optimists,* and *high optimists.* The *low* and *high* groups of student-athletes were considered for the qualitative interview. There were several similarities between the two groups regarding instructive behavior, feedback behavior, relatability, coach traits, and situational actions, but there are also several differences between the two groups in how the student-athletes prefer their coach to approach them. These differences are highlighted best in the category *Reactive Behaviors* with the high optimistic theme *Encourages* implying preference for a coach to focus on present emotions in order to attain future success while the low optimistic theme *Reassures Athlete of Ability* implies the

preference for a coach to focus on past successes in order to attain success in the present. The category *Coach Orientation* (relationship- v results/task-focused) was much more convoluted than expected following past research. All four categories and emergent themes are described in full. The results reveal a deep difference in individual student-athlete perspective according to optimism levels and potential future research in discussed further.

Keywords: preferred leadership behaviors, optimism, pessimism, athlete personality, personality differences

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B.S., University of Tennessee, Chattanooga, 2009

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

STATESBORO, GEORGIA

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Electronic Version Approved:
Spring 2015

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to every person who has touched my life, and especially: to my whole family who raised and always supported me, to my friends with whom I shared times both good and bad, to two separate coaches who showed me the power of leadership, to the girl who showed me all that I was not and let me see all that I could become, and to the One that made all that is possibility into a reality. This success may have flowed through me, but I would not be me without you, whether the contribution was "positive" or "negative" is all relative; you have given me the outlook, courage, and fortitude that makes my success possible. To all you future thesis writers out there say goodbye to Spring Break, it was fun while it lasted but there is nothing more rewarding than contributing positively to world.

Acknowledgements

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The question of leadership is present across a wide range of social situations. Most people have a concept of what a leader is, but when an individual describes what behaviors are preferred from a leader the words used could be strikingly different from one person to the next. Such a statement is no less true when considering the sporting world. There has been a significant amount of research concerning sport leadership over the past decades (Chelladurai, 1978; 1990; and 1993; Fry, Hannah, Noel, & Walumbwa, 2011; Wunderley, Reddy, & Dember, 1998; Zaccaro, Rittman, & Marks, 2001). Specific research has concentrated on actual behavior of a leader (Burdette, Joyner, Czech, & Carlson, 2011; Burke, Stagl, Klein, Goodwin, Salas, & Halpin, 2006) and leadership styles (Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans, & May, 2004; Fry, 2003; Gomes, Sousa, Cruz, 2006; Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). In general, leadership itself is viewed as: "the behavioral process of influencing individuals and groups toward set goals" (Barrow, 1977 p. 232). Past research has led to such frameworks as a trait approach, a behavioral approach, a situational model, and several contingency models to explain the contributing factors behind a leader's behavior. Outside of visible behaviors are the goals by which a leader ascribes to guide their interactions with their followers. A leader's chosen goals, such as winning versus performance or fostering relationships versus focusing on the task, come to describe that leader's style. Examples of common styles in use today include: transactional, transformational, spiritual, and authentic (Avolio, et. al., 2004; Fry, 2003; Popper, Mayseless, Castelnovo, 2000). Past research points to the idea that one leader can ascribe to values, goals, and behaviors that can be quite different from another leader.

While there are a multitude of frameworks to describe leadership, Chelladurai's (1980) multi-dimensional model of sport leadership (MML) is one that finds credence when it comes to application in the world of sport. This model is based from Fiedler's Contingency Model (1967), which is concerned with the factors that contribute to an individual's actions in a given situation. The MML considers situational characteristics, member characteristics, and leader characteristics as antecedents to leadership behavior. These antecedents find expression in three types of coaching behavior: required behavior, preferred behavior, and actual behavior. Chelladurai (1980) contends that congruency between those three types of behavior will lend to increased performance and satisfaction levels from the members. To assess leadership with regards to the MML, Chelladurai and Saleh (1980) developed the Leadership Scale for Sport (LSS). This scale is designed to measure any or all of: the athlete's preference for leadership behavior by the coach, the actual leadership behavior of the coach as perceived by the athlete, and the actual leadership behavior as self-reported by the coach. The scale evaluates the scores for five areas of leadership: democratic behavior, training and instruction, feedback, social support, and autocratic behavior. Due to inconsistencies between the LSS and the MML, Zhang and Jensen (1997) revised the scale to include group maintenance and situational characteristics. The authors defined 'group maintenance' as behaviors that add to group cohesion and focus on building relationships among the team members, including the coaching staff. 'Situational characteristics' accounts for factors such as the time, the game, the environment, and the team. Both of these new dimensions were added in the first revision; however, as 'group maintenance' was found to emerge in the original dimension 'social support', only 'situational characteristics' was included in the final revision (Zhang & Jensen, 1997).

The focus of many research projects has been the factors behind the three aforementioned antecedents. Member characteristics in particular lead to perceptions of preferred leadership. For example, male athletes have been shown to prefer instructional behavior and autocratic decision-making while female athletes prefer more democratic decision-making and participatory leadership (Beam, Serwatka, & Wilson, 2004; Chelladurai & Arnott, 1985; Lam, et al. 2007; Martin et al.2001; Riemer & Toon, 2001; Sherman, Fuller, & Speed, 2000; Turman, 2003; Weinberg & Gould, 2010). Situational characteristics as well have been found to determine leadership preferences; situational characteristics such as level of competition, maturity of the athletes, and type of sport (individual versus team) will ask for different behaviors from a coach (Chelladurai & Arnott, 1985; Chelladurai, Haggerty, & Baxter, 1989; Hersey, 1984; Weinburg & Gould, 2010). The present research will focus on member characteristics, and the part personality dispositions may lend in perceptions of preferred leadership behaviors.

From the coaching perspective of member characteristics, previous research suggest that there is no single "best" way to lead a team (Chelladurai & Carron, 1974; Hersey & Blanchard, 1972; Sherman, Fuller, & Speed, 2000; Weinburg & Gould, 2010). Rather, that there are several contributors to a coach's chosen style of leadership that are common in today's sport environment. One potential factor that may guide a coach's chosen style is that coach's level of experience (Freakley, Czech, Harris, & Burdette, 2012). A noted aspect of successful sport coaches is adaptability; therefore, the longer a coach is in the game, the more likely she or he will change their style. Another aspect is a team's level of competition (Burke, et al, 2006). A higher level of competition may require different behaviors and demands than a lower level of competition. When it comes to more successful sport leaders, Weinberg and Gould (2010) put forth a summary of past research on leadership from the coach's perspective: "…as we have

seen, no one set of characteristics ensure successful leadership. Effective leadership styles or behaviors fit the specific situation. Leadership styles can be changed [over time]" (pg. 211).

Differing views of Leadership from the Athlete Perspective

Coaches' particular preferences may conflict with how their athletes prefer to be coached with the finding that: "what may be an appropriate coaching behavior to one athlete may be an ineffective approach for another" (Sherman, Fuller, & Speed, 2000, pg. 390). On top of a coach's need to cater to the athletes, Tinning (1982) contends that certain coaching behaviors may be more productive toward certain outcomes. As an example, one might argue that autocratic behavior whilst giving training and instruction would be more effective than exhibiting democratic behavior in the same situation. Additional research findings point to a number of factors that influence what an athlete prefers from her or his coach, namely: gender, athlete maturity, and type of sport. Beam, Serwatka, and Wilson (2004) found that male NCAA Division I and II student- athletes show more preference for autocratic and social support behaviors on the R-LSS, while female NCAA Division I and II student- athletes prefer situational consideration and democratic behaviors from the coach. The same research found that independent sport athletes (e.g. tennis or golf) exhibit greater preference for democratic, positive feedback, situational consideration, and social support behaviors than team sport athletes. Chelladurai and Carron (1983) studied potential differences in preferred leadership behaviors with regards to level of competition, which they call athletic maturity. Athlete maturity is operationalized by the athlete's time spent in a particular sport and is described as: "an athlete's capacity to set high but attainable goals (achievement motivation), willingness to and ability to take responsibility, and education/ experience of an individual or group" (p. 372). Across four groups of basketball student-athletes and utilizing the LSS, these researchers show that preference for training and

instruction behaviors progressively decreases from younger high school student-athletes to older higher school student-athletes before taking a sharp increase for university level student-athletes. The findings for social support behaviors reveal a linear increase in preference across all four groups. Along with similar past projects, this research by Chelladurai and Carron (1983) reveals that differences among athletes can influence perceptions of preferred leader behaviors (Burdette, et al 2010; Burke, et al, 2006).

The Potential for Optimism Levels Influencing Views of Leadership

One aspect of the athlete that has received limited attention in terms of perceptions of leadership is a student- athlete's personality. There are several construct within the concept of personality that may influence differing preferences for leadership behavior; however, the rationale behind the present research is found in Seligman, Nolan-Hoeksema, Thornton, and Thornton's (1990) findings that individuals of optimistic and pessimistic dispositions intake negative feedback from their coach in different manners. These researchers found that pessimistic athletes respond to negative feedback regarding their performance in a way that decreases confidence and application of effort, while optimistic athletes respond to the same feedback as a challenge to improve and as a statement that they need to work harder. Such a difference in response to coach feedback opens the door to high and low optimistic athletes preferring further differences in total coach behavior. The focus on the concept of dispositional optimism in the present study is for three specific reasons. First, optimism and pessimism have been label as explanatory styles, or how an individual perceives occurrences in an environment (Dember, Helton, Matthews, & Warm, 1999). Explanatory style has been shown to: predict behavior in adverse contexts, influence decision-making, and influence a wide range of actions (Satterfield, 2000). Second, optimism levels have been associated with how an individual intakes

and processes environmental information (Abramson, 2000; Shatté, Gillham, & Reivich, 2000). Lastly, optimism levels are seen to influence an individual's perceptions of controllability; which in turn can influence an individual's motivation level (Satterfield, 2000).

Individuals tending toward optimism will view negative life events as unstable, external, and due to a specific cause (Abramson, et al, 2000; Dember, et al, 1999). These individuals do not feel that negative consequences will necessarily follow a negative event. High optimists also do not feel that a negative event infers an inherent flaw within themselves. Those tending toward pessimism will view a negative life event as stable, internal, and global (Abramson, et al, 2000; Dember, et al, 1999). These individuals tend to feel that negative consequences follow a negative event, and that an occurrence of a negative event infers that something is fundamentally wrong with themselves. As a sporting example, if one were not receiving their desired playing time a pessimist might believe they are not a good athlete. In the same situation an optimist might believe they are simply not training hard enough. In terms of interpreting information, pessimists tend to engage in negatively toned processing about themselves and will respond more quickly to negative self-referent information (Abramson, et al, 2000). Optimists on the other hand will suffer decreased emotional consequences following setbacks, and develop an increased task-specific focus (Satterfield, 2000). Optimism and pessimism also seems to have an effect on how an athlete approaches adversity. According to Schulman's (1999) study, high optimists tend to view adversity as a challenge, will find solutions from initial problems, and will rebound more quickly from setbacks. When it comes to motivation, those with higher levels of optimism have been correlated with increased beliefs of controllability. These beliefs are shown to increase the motivation to persist. On the other hand pessimistic individuals are seen to exhibit helplessness beliefs, or that their actions have no effect on causes or consequences of an event. These beliefs

are shown to decrease goal-oriented behaviors (Satterfield, 2000). An athlete's motivation level is considered vastly important in terms of her or his application and continuation in sport (Alfermann, Lee, & Würth, 2005; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2007; Harwood, & Knight, 2009; Ullrich-French, & Smith, 2009). According to past research, highly optimistic athletes tend to show more self-confidence and have more belief in their ability to perform certain tasks and succeed in certain situations (Shearman, et al, 2011).

Research Problem and Purpose Statement

With the knowledge that differences in dispositional optimism has such an influence on an individual's behaviors, specifically level of effort, persistence, and motivation, there is the potential that such differences also have a deep influence on an individual's perceptions of preferred leadership behaviors. On the other hand and in light of the performance-based environment of athletics, the concept of sport leadership may be ubiquitous to the point that differences in personality disposition have a minimal impact on perceptions of preferred leadership behaviors. In other words, there is also the potential that both high and low optimistic student- athletes perceive preferred leadership behaviors in similar manners following previous research within a trait approach (Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002) as well as findings by Sherman, Fuller, and Speed (2000) that reveal minimal differences for preferred leadership between male and female athletes. Such a range of possibilities reveals the importance of a qualitative understanding of an individual's experience on a humanistic level (Fischer, 2006). Qualitative research with a humanistic perspective acknowledges the individual perspectives of both human participants and human researchers. The humanistic perspective will allow for a phenomenological exploration of leadership through the eyes of student- athletes. As most of the previous research regarding an athlete's perception of sport leadership has focused on an

athlete's stage in her or his sport career (Beam, Serwatka, & Wilson, 2004; Chelladurai, & Carron, 1983; Chelladurai, 1984; Dieffenbach, Gould, & Moffet, 2008), there is limited research on how personality dispositions may influence the athlete's perception of preferred leadership. Thus, the purpose of this study is to qualitatively examine high and low optimistic NCAA Division I athletes' perceptions of preferred leadership qualities.

CHAPTER 2

Methods

Participants

106 NCAA Division I athletes from a south eastern university campus completed the Life Orientation Test- Revised (LOT-R), which measures optimism levels and is described in further detail in the 'Instruments' section. These participants were contacted through the coaches of several different types of sport and both genders. They were informed of the research purposes, procedures, and their place in the research should they choose to participate. Demographically speaking 52 were male, and 54 were female while the sports were men's soccer (N=19), baseball (N=33), women's tennis (N=8), women's soccer (N=14), swimming and diving (N=21), and volleyball (N=13). Once the data were split into low and high optimistic groups for the qualitative interview, which is further described below, there were 25 available for the low optimistic group and 22 available for the high optimistic group. From those 25 and 22 available, 11 interviewed from the low optimistic group and 10 interviewed from the high optimistic group following random selection. Of the student-athletes interviewed in the group of 11, the demographics are as follows: swimming and diving (N=1), women's tennis (N=1), men's soccer (N=2), baseball (N=3), women's soccer (N=2), and volleyball (N=2). Of the student-athletes interviewed in the group of 10, the demographics are: swimming and diving (N=1), men's soccer (N=2), volleyball (N=1), women's tennis (N=2), women's soccer (N=2), and baseball (N=2). Table 1 provides the pseudonyms necessary for qualitative research interviews.

Table 1. *Chart of Pseudonyms*

Pseudonym	Sport	Optimism Level		Pseudonym	Sport	Optimism Level
Quinn	Men's Soccer	High		Patricia	Women's Tennis	Low
Paul	Men's Soccer	High		Brian	Men's Soccer	Low
Sarah	Volleyball	High		Kevin	Men's Soccer	Low
Rachel	Women's Tennis	High		Thomas	Baseball	Low
Margaret	Women's Tennis	High		William	Baseball	Low
Michelle	Women's Soccer	High		Joseph	Baseball	Low
Sandra	Women's Soccer	High		Maria	Women's Soccer	Low
Ruth	Swimming	High		Lisa	Women's Soccer	Low
Michael	Baseball	High		Carol	Volleyball	Low
Steven	Baseball	High		Jennifer	Volleyball	Low
				Kimberly	Swimming	Low

Instrumentation

Life Orientation Test, Revised (LOT-R). The original design of this scale is uni-dimensional. While a debate has arisen in the literature following factor-analysis that suggests optimism and pessimism are two separate constructs, the present research viewed the measure as a bivariate factor in light of correlational studies with outside criteria which reveal patterns suggesting that optimism and pessimism to be on opposite ends of the same underlying

dimension (Fischer, & Chalmers, 2008). The questionnaire consists of 10 items: three items assess optimism, three items assess pessimism, and four items are fillers. All items are along a 5 point Likert scale that ranges from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree.* Examples of prompts include: "In uncertain times, I usually expect the best", or "I hardly expect things to go my way." From the six scored items, participants can have a score ranging from 6-30 with the pessimism items being reverse-scored; thus a high score on the LOT-R signifies high use of optimism in explaining events (Herzberg, Glaesmer, & Hoyer, 2006). Internal reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha, which was .82. Convergent, divergent, and construct validities of the measure have all been attained through confirmatory factor analysis and correlational studies with outside constructs (Burke, Joyner, Czech, & Wilson, 2000).

The Researcher as an Instrument

In qualitative research the primary instrument used in data collection with a phenomenological approach is the researcher. Due to phenomenology's concentration on personal experiences of an idea, it is essential to have insight into the researcher's own history with relation to preferred leadership. The following is a description of my experiences as a leader and observations of leadership.

The idea of leadership began to enter my mind during my early years of playing soccer when my mother would urge me to: "be the vocal leader on the field." I was not the most technically apt player, but my style of leadership came through consistent hard work on the field and encouragement of my teammates during games. During practices I would make numerous mistakes, but I never gave up trying to learn a new skill and I was always vocally pushing my

teammates to "give it their all." My efforts were recognized as I was voted team captain at the age of 15 after some years on the team, despite not being the most accomplished technical player. My conduct during games and at practices did not drastically change at first; however, now I was expected to act as a bridge between the players and the coaches when it came to decisions and any potential issues. I held the position of team captain for three consecutive seasons, during which time my style of leading and playing changed. At one point I had become prone to showing frustration on the field if I perceived my teammates as not playing to their potential, and I also developed the tendency to take on increased responsibility during games as my technical and tactical ability grew; these new codes of conduct would take responsibility away from my teammates and demonstrated distrust in them. Even if I would say that I trusted my teammates, my leadership actions revealed differently. The team played well during this time, but we definitely could have played at a higher level. Near the end of my captainship the team played in a tournament where I came to realize the shortcomings of my on-field conduct. I played my best soccer during that tournament and my leadership behaviors changed almost entirely: I was still vocal, but now I reverted back to more encouraging and challenging my teammates rather than exhibiting anger as well as developing the trust to delegate responsibilities. The team seemed to turn a corner after that tournament and the spirit of camaraderie increased two-fold; our performances became of a higher level and it became more fun. A mutual decision between the coach and myself saw us give the captain's armband to another long-serving member of the team during my last year. The new captain took over vocal responsibilities of pushing us and encouraging us, as well as leading by example, but my positions as emotional leader and coach's confidant did not change. During my time as a team

captain I was not expected to provide any instruction or planning for practices; I was however, charged with motivating, challenging, and providing consistent levels of performance.

After that I received a position as an Emergency Room scribe at the age of 20. In this environment, the doctor is the official leader. The doctors are expected to make decisions and delegate tasks regarding patient needs, and I had the opportunity to observe different styles of directing the Emergency Room. There were doctors who were highly demanding, ones that micro-managed the rest of the staff, and there were those who acted more leniently, ones who trusted that the staff knew what they were doing. The main differentiating factor in Emergency Room effectiveness however, was doctor competence. I saw doctors that could be described as any of: cocky, easily-flustered, overly-deliberate, calm, decisive, and many more. All of these descriptions would fall across a wide range of ability and situations. The techs, nurses, and administrative personnel all fed off the mood of the doctor on shift and how demanding that doctor was. I talked with several experienced nurses over numerous shifts, and the consensus was that they would rather work with a doctor who is skilled at their job than one who is not regardless of personality or level of demand.

During my time as a scribe I was also an assistant soccer coach for a team of 11-13 year old boys. I was charged with assisting the head coach during full practices as well as planning practices and activities for a smaller group of the lower-skilled individuals. My goal for this group was to create a fun environment that would challenge these individuals and let them learn how the game works. For games I would give them tactical instructions and make substitutions. Gaining their trust in my ability and fairness was high on my list.

Now at 24 I am a teaching assistant for undergraduate physical activity courses. I am in charge of several classes on my own and I must develop lesson plans, break-down technical

skills of a sport, develop and write quizzes, and convey aspects of that sport in an understandable fashion. Several aspects of teaching that I have found to be successful for undergraduate classes are: having clearly developed plans with contingencies, being adaptable, being fair yet firm, learning the names of students, learning the individual personalities within the class and of the class as a whole, having an intimate knowledge of the sport, and gauging what the students want from the class with respect to the goals of the department. I feel my responsibility to the students is to show them how much fun can be had through sport and physical activity, and, in light of these physical activity courses being required to graduate the university, to remind them that sometimes we must do things that we do not want to do in order to get where we want to be. Out of my experiences in this position I have learned that I have a natural love of teaching, and that leniency has its place among undergraduate students. Due to life occurrences and change, I would label myself a high optimist though I have never taken the LOT-R. When it comes to being a leader I have moved through several styles of leadership from a more "hard-nosed" and unforgiving approach to a more inclusive and understanding approach.

Outside of my deep interest in history and "cults of personality," these are the most memorable experiences I have had regarding being in leadership positions, and closely observing those in leadership positions.

Procedure

After IRB approval was attained, participants were contacted through the coach of their team and the researcher described the research and their position in it. The student- athletes who chose to participate were given the LOT-R questionnaire on paper. Participants were reminded of their anonymity, their ability to discontinue the survey for whatever reason, for what the research is, and of their access to the completion of the study. Participants for interview were selected

from the LOT-R data and was split according to .75 of one standard deviation above and below the mean score to form three groups: low, mid, and high. Only the low and high scores were considered for the rest of the study. This method of splitting data has been used in past research, and it has been shown to be sound in terms of data manipulation (Gelman, & Park, 2014; Shearman, et al, 2011). Individuals for interview were selected by a randomization program. From the low optimism group 11 student-athletes were interviewd, from the high optimism group 10 student-athletes were interviewed.

Once the interview process began, each participant in the study chose to participate voluntarily and could drop out at any time. No part of the interview was invasive to the participants involved within the study outside of the participants' presence. The private setting of the interviews was a personal office at the host university. Before beginning the study, each participant was advised of the following:

a.) interviews will be taped to ensure accuracy and thoroughness.

b.) the interview may cease at any time the participant wishes.

c.) any clarifications about the research study will be answered if asked.

d.) The participant agrees to answer in a voluntary manner and no compensation will be awarded for participation.

e.) Once completed, the participants may read over the interview.

f.) Transcripts of the interviews will only be seen by the researcher and those assisting with the study.

g.) Participants will be thanked for their time at the end of the interview.

Everyone assisting in the research process signed a confidentiality form to respect the privacy

and confidentiality of the participants. The research team consists of the lead researcher and

thesis committee chair. All members of the research team have an understanding of the

qualitative process through readings, classes and actual experience with the method. The raw

data itself was coded following a phenomenological approach as described by Groenewald

(2004) and further described below. In the phenomenological method the researcher attempts to

uncover the meaning that lives within an experience and to convey that understanding in words.

Such coding lends a coherent, rich narrative about the experience itself through the eyes of the

student-athletes (Groenewald, 2004; Thomas, 2006).

Explication of the Data

Splitting the Data

To begin, the researcher tested for normalcy across the LOT-R scores. Three groups were

then formed according the distribution of the data following .75 of one (1) full standard

deviation: low optimist, middle optimist, high optimist. Only the low and high optimists were

considered for the remainder of the research. Based off a similar method successfully used by

Andrew and Kent (2007) and Shearman, et al (2011), the present study believes that if there were

any significance to be found, it will come from any differences from the two extremes on the

LOT-R questionnaire exhibit.

Qualitative Analysis

Interview Protocol

This study used semi-structured interview questions to obtain data. The semi-structured

nature of the interviews assists the participant's ability to answer questions in detail and to

discuss their experiences relative to each question in real time conversation. Due to the current lack of a more specified set of questions, the present study based the pilot interview questions from Freakley's (2013) study that focused on perceptions of optimal leadership among NCAA Division I men's soccer head coaches. Adaptations to the actual questions used for this present study followed participant responses and were tailored toward an NCAA Division I student-athlete's preferences for leadership behaviors. The opened ended questions following the pilot interview were:

1. When you think about optimal leadership traits that you prefer in a coach, what comes to mind?

2. When you think about optimal leadership behaviors that you prefer from your coach, what comes to mind?

3. When you think about past leadership situations within your sporting experience in which your coach led optimally, what comes to mind?

4. Which of the following styles best describes your optimal coach:

   A coach who focuses on developing and maintaining good interpersonal relationships?

   A coach who focuses on setting goals and achieving results. Why?

   With qualitative research, the data must be defined with meaning, clarity, and discrimination (Henderson, 1992). The main goals when analyzing the data include: capturing the participant's experience, maintaining the meaning of the text from the interview while maximizing its usefulness, maintaining confidentiality while analyzing data, interpreting the data conservatively and not jumping to conclusions or allowing biases to interfere, and describing the general experience of the participant (Hawthorne, 1988). These goals will be maintained by

using a four-step method outlined by Czech et al. (2004), Goodrich (1988), Hawthorne (1988), Henderson (1992), and Paton (2002).

Approaching the interviews.

Transcribing the interview.

All interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed verbatim to create a text. Only the lead researcher had access to the digitally recorded interviews. This limited access helps maintain confidentiality of the participants. Transcriptions were completed by the lead researcher. The transcript were then verified with the actual audio from the interview to ensure accuracy of the information obtained and to check that nothing of importance might be added or removed from the transcription.

Obtaining a grasp of the interview

This part of qualitative research involves repeatedly reading the transcripts to obtain a full understanding of what is said. It is important to have a holistic view of the transcripts and form meaning of the transcripts as a whole (Kruger, 1979). Repeatedly reading, viewing, and listening to the transcripts and audiotapes will help enable a complete understanding of the transcripts.

Focusing the data.

Bracketing the text

This process involves organizing the data into meaningful units or groups (Giorgi, 1984; Kruger, 1979). Such units are formed based on: ease of readability, elimination of repetition, and decreasing clutter (Hawthorne, 1988). It is important to try to keep the statements in the transcript as close to their original form when grouping them into units. The research team-members helped analyze these meaningful groups with the themes in order to ensure the themes

are removed from researcher subjection. This member checking helped remove bias when creating categories and themes from the data.

Phenomenological reduction.

Eliminating irrelevant, repetitive, or overlapping data

During this step, all repeated information was removed. Also, information that is not directly relevant to the phenomenon at hand was removed. Over-lapping and repetitive data can hinder readability and understanding, thus removing such data helps counter that effect. False starts, asides, and conversational utterances was also removed at this stage (Henderson, 1992).

Verifying the elimination of the data

During this step, the research team verified the reduced transcript in the hope that the intended meaning and experience remains intact. After this stage, the transcript should still contain rich and meaningful description that is easy to read.

Releasing meanings.

Delineating units of meaning

The data were then placed into meaningful categories based on the groups formed in the previous steps (Patton, 2002). The lead researcher, a group of peers, and thesis chair together categorized and then compared the outcomes to see if they are similar for all three.

Clustering of units to form themes

After the categories are formed, different themes were created. These themes were created based on repeated analysis of the categories and their meanings. Each theme created aims to convey the collected data in an accurate and meaningful fashion.

Describing the themes

When describing or presenting the data from qualitative research, two recommendations are necessary to follow: 1) focusing and balancing, and 2) description and interpretation (Patton, 1990). Due to the fact that so much text was collected and transcribed, it is important to omit data that did not contribute meaning to the phenomenon at hand. It is also be necessary to use direct quotations from the interviews to provide concise and accurate meaning. That being said, a solid balance of direct quotations and interpretation of the data and themes formed should be presented.

Reliability

If the results are replicable and consistent across time, then they can be considered reliable. In qualitative research, the data is reliable if it provides an honest interpretation and can be trusted as conveying the participant's intentions (Patton, 2002). Essentially, if multiple individuals can agree on an accurate description of what happens in the interviews, then it can be considered reliable. If the participant can read through the results and agree that these themes and categories are their lived experience and what they were trying to convey, then the study can be considered reliable. With existential phenomenological research, the participant is viewed as an expert in the given topic of study (Patton, 2002). That being said, the participants must be viewed as trustworthy, and the data can be considered reliable if it accurately depicts their expert experiences.

Validity

Data resulting from qualitative phenomenology can be viewed as valid if it is revealing or important for each individual reader (Polkinghorne, 1989). The reader should be able to read the

research report, follow each step taken leading up to the conclusions, and find them meaningful and eye-opening. The following questions can be asked to assess validity of the research: Does this description give an accurate picture of the common features and the structural connections that are evident in the examples which have been collected? Did the interviewer influence the contents of the descriptions to the extent that the actual experience is not truly reflected? Are transcriptions accurate? Were conclusions other than those offered by the researcher possible in the analysis? Have any alternatives been identified and discussed for suitability? Do the specific contents and connections in the transcripts provide evidence for structural description? Is the structural description specific to one situation, or does it hold for other situations? (Polkinghorne, 1989).

Validity must also be ensured through the reduction of the researcher bias. Triangulation helps minimize bias throughout data collection and analysis. Triangulation will be used in the current study and included member checking, and peer review.

Chapter 3

Results

All participants in this study are current NCAA Division I student-athletes, but come

from a variety of sports and both genders. Following the interviews and reading of the

transcripts, four major categories arose to describe these student-athletes' preferred leadership

characteristics. Perceptions of these four categories were split into two groups: *high optimists*

and *low optimists.* Within the categories, certain themes consistently emerged as the student-

athletes shared their views on preferred leadership.

Category I: Coach Traits

Every person has words that can describe a part of who they are; those in leadership

positions are not exempt from this statement. While the exact words used by student-athletes can

be different, there are several overarching traits that arose during the interviews with the high

optimistic group that encompass some preferences of these student-athletes. The following are

the themes that are prevalent for the high optimistic student-athletes.

High Optimist- **Theme 1: Devoted to the game/ Demanding of the individual**

All ten (10) of the student-athletes interviewed in the high optimistic group agree that

they wish to see their coach demonstrate a deep devotion to the game itself. This devotion is

shown by a coach that has history of playing the sport, has a vast knowledge of the game, and

consistently shows passion for the job. When asked about traits that he prefers in his coach

Michael immediately responded with: "Passionate, aggressive, just somebody whose drive is

there just about the game as a whole." Steven followed suit by simply stating: "Let's you know

how passionate he is about the game," while Paul adds: "Just kind of having that knowledge to humble you a little bit where you're like: "alright, I don't know everything and he can help me out here." "

This preference for a devotion to the game seems to lead to a duty for the coach to be demanding of her or his athletes in giving their best. Rachel offers: "I think it's important someone who is motivated. Someone who expects a lot out of you, I think that is a really good trait in a coach. I don't know how they'd express that, but always demand more, and always demanding your best." Furthermore, Michael and Margaret state:

> He was the type of guy that would make sure that you are getting what he is trying to put out to you: if we're running a specific drill, if we're going over a group of plays, he would make sure we got it before he moved onto the next.

> I think also a vast knowledge of what he is doing. If I know 1%, he should know 99%. And your success, even if you're super talented, it's going to be 50/50 anyways. If you're going to give your 50, but if the coach does not give you 50 it's not going to work out, so it should be a person who really knows what he or she does. 90% you have to do what he tells you, because coach knows better. I think his practice should be based on his knowledge and based on your game, because if you have some weaknesses you need to work on them.

High Optimists- **Theme 2: Loyal to the team/ Inspiring to the Individual**

In addition to a devotion to the game, eight (8) out of 10 student-athletes in the high optimism group express that they wish to see the coach demonstrate loyalty to the team as a whole, and indeed to both her or himself as well as to the individual players. The word 'loyalty' to these student-athletes seems to mean: a willingness to take the fall for the team should events transpire poorly, seeing through what is told to the team and to individuals, and a willingness to "go to bat" for individual athletes on the team. Essentially what these student-athlete profess to prefer is a coach that will do what is best for the team or individuals without forsaking her or his

own self as the student-athletes will draw inspiration from a coach who demonstrates this loyalty.

The student-athletes acknowledge the difficult work it is to be a coach and it seems that witnessing such strength of personality in turn lends efficacy to the high optimistic student-athletes on the team. Michelle, Steven, and Rachel describe this inspiring loyalty as:

> - I feel like dealing with a difficult situation and someone deals with it in a better way, and you see that and you are inspired to do the same. Someone willing to take on challenges. As an athlete you want to know who you are playing for and what you are playing for. I want to feel comfortable under that leadership and I want to feel encouraged and inspired. I feel like a leader should be able to…their job is to lead themselves and others in that direction. -Michelle

> -I think that is a huge part because if your coach doesn't stick up for you when something is wrong then that leads to a snowball effect: you lose respect for him, don't want to listen to what he says, teammates see that you're not doing that, then they don't want to do it. So I think that is a big part that a coach has to play.

> - I think when a coach has a really good attitude coming out to practice it carries over to the team. They're excited to be out there, they want it as much as you do, and they're willing to push you. I think that helps the team because they see that in leadership and it pushes us harder.

High Optimists- **Theme 3: Situationally/Personally Aware**

Lastly, nine (9) out of 10 interviewed from the high optimistic group state that they prefer a coach that has the ability to read well the situation at hand and, or individual student-athletes. Student-athletes confront a number of ranging situations throughout their collegiate career, and a coach that has the experience and knowledge to interpret these situations as well as the willingness to act appropriately seems to get the best out of her or his high optimistic student-

athletes. In order to respond optimally in many situations however, it seems that a personal

understanding of individual student-athletes is of great importance.

A coach's ability to know her or his athletes can go a long way in arriving at the best

course of action in both positive and negative situations, both of which will be encountered in

collegiate athletics. To high optimistic student-athletes it seems that getting the very best from

them goes beyond demanding the best or inspiring the best, but includes a certain personal touch

as well. Ruth, Paul, Rachel, and Steven contribute:

> I definitely want a coach that can relate or get his or her point across to everyone regardless of their, I don't know if this makes sense, but sometimes people have different learning styles: they work better with someone yelling at them constantly, or they work better with you just telling them.

> It just depends on the situation I guess, there's games when you need a kick in the butt and there's games when you're down and everyone's flustered and going crazy and you just need somebody to say: "I believe in you guys, you guys got this."

> I think that as a leader it is important to know how different players respond in different situations. I think a combination; someone who is on your back when they need to be, being hard on you when they need to be when you need that push, but doing it in a way that doesn't rip apart a player.

> To be honest I like it when the coach is fired up about something or if I'm not doing good, then he really lets me know: yell or something. I think I respond best to that. When I'm doing well, me personally, I just like to stay in my zone. I don't really need too much talk, the kind of coach that just walks by me and gives me a little fist bump. That's all I really need to know and I just keep going from there.

It must be noted that actual examples reveal different particular preferences when it comes to

interactions with the coach, but these student-athletes all mentioned a need for the coach to know

who they are as individuals in order to be aware of those particulars.

Category I: Coach Traits

Below are the themes that emerged from the interviews with the low optimistic student-athletes.

Low Optimists- **Theme 1: Role-Model**

Nine (9) out of 11 low optimistic student-athletes interviewed stated a preference for a coach that is a role-model to them. Having a coach that is an example of how to act in times good and bad seems to be of great importance to this group of student-athletes. When asked what comes to mind with optimal traits in a coach, Joseph states: "Hardworking: a coach that just stands around and tells people what to do isn't really what you want. You want some guy that is going to be out there with you showing you what to do not just telling you." Thomas followed by stating: "I look up to leaders that show by example. Some people think that if a leader is not talking it up and getting you going, then they're not a leader. But I think leading by example shows more."

These student-athletes express the desire for a coach that not only has expectations, but will also live according to those expectations. In doing so, it seems the coach's actions will in turn provide that example for the student-athletes to emulate. Carol offers: "I would definitely say dedicated, because I feel like when you have a coach that you know is working even harder than you're already working, then it almost makes you want to push harder for them." Student-athletes seem to look to their coach to demonstrate the most effective way to conduct themselves in given situations as Jennifer explains:

> Well body language is really important to me. If you look to the sideline and you see your coach is disengaged, or you look to the sideline and they're throwing a clipboard, or you know you did something wrong but you look over there and see them instead of trying to help you they're just like: "oh well, she's a lost cause." Playing-wise a coach's body language is really important, especially game time.

Low Optimists- **Theme 2: Constructive Communicator/ Competent**

In addition to leading by example, nine (9) of the 11 student-athletes in this group prefer a coach that can communicate in a positive and constructive manner. "Consistent", "patient", and "respectful" are words that appeared several times throughout the interviews. Coaches that can convey what they see in a way that "builds the athletes up" seem to be beneficial in getting the best out of these student-athletes. When discussing optimal traits, Brian offers:

> Probably someone that has patience, they can be patient with people if someone's not getting something, they're not just going to get really pissed off at them. Like if I'm trying to do something and it's just not working, I don't want them to get more and more impatient with me because I'm usually my own biggest critic so I usually don't need somebody else criticizing me like that too, but if I keep messing up just like keep encouraging me.

In terms of maintaining consistency, Thomas states he wants to see a coach that:

> Just whoever they are on the field be like that off the field too, because you don't want two different people. I've had coaches in the past that are completely different on the field and completely different off the field and it is just hard to understand them sometimes.

One aspect of being able to communicate constructively in the sport world is competence according to these student-athletes. 'How can the coach tell me what to do if she or he doesn't know what to?' is the overarching question from the low optimistic student-athletes. As Carol describes:

> In college especially a huge thing is watching film, and so I like when I know my coach is working extra hours seeing other team's film, dissecting it and putting that in practice plans and really working that in so we can prepare for a team even better. So I definitely like when a coach is prepared, because I feel like sometimes you walk into a practice and you can tell if they're just like: "okay, go do this, I didn't really plan for this" and it's kind of hectic. So I like a coach that knows what they want and is trying to get the most out of us.

Low Optimists- **Theme 3: Motivating to the Individual**

Every person is different and has her or his own particular quirks, and all 11 low optimistic student- athletes mentioned a preference for a coach that knows how to motivate them as individuals. In order to do so effectively, those interviewed state that the coach must balance driving the athlete with knowing them on a personal level. Joseph mentions that he prefers a coach that is: "I wouldn't say a friend because a coach isn't supposed to be your friend, but I think it is always good if a coach know his players on the personal level; just makes it seem like he cares about you, makes you want to play more."

When discussing a coach giving feedback, Kimberly states: "Definitely I think the best approach is to do the: this is something that you did well, and this is what we need to work on. I think that's the best approach with athletes in general," while Kevin highlights individuality by saying: "Yeah, that's what I prefer [for a coach to come down on me when I play poorly]. For me, that's what I prefer because it gets me fired up and makes me play better," followed by Patricia's explanation of what gets the best out of her:

> I had a coach when I used to practice back in France, and he just understood me very well, and personally me as a player I need someone who is really strict and who will tell me exactly what to do, because if someone doesn't tell me what to do then I don't do it.

Carol summarizes well the importance of the coach knowing her or his players with her preference:

> Definitely a coach that can adapt to different players, because there are some coaches that are like: "I'm a yeller," like I can take that, but some players just shut down. So I think a coach that can adapt to different player types is also really critical and can help a team out a lot.

Category II: Proactive Behaviors

In order to create a desired environment, a coach must present her or himself in a certain manner on a consistent basis. Statements given by all those interviewed led to this category of proactive behaviors, or behaviors expressed by the coach that originate within her or himself and do not necessitate an external event. The following are the consistent themes found within the high optimistic group.

High Optimists- **Theme 1: Shows Care for Athlete/ Person**

According to eight (8) out of 10 interviewed high optimistic student-athletes in order for a coach to gain an understanding of her or his student- athletes, that coach must show to that individual person an effort to learn aspects of the person outside of their chosen sport. Asking individuals about school, other relationships, cares and worries, and having an "open door policy" all seem to be ways for a coach to reach out to her or his high optimistic student-athletes. When asked about behaviors that he would like to see from a coach Quinn offered: "Coach I had a couple years ago I would run through the wall for just because he took that time to get to know us, he loved us, and you could see it," followed by Steven's statement that: "I think the most important thing is just someone that you feel comfortable around in general. I look in a coach, it has to be someone that you can talk to about anything, not necessarily just about baseball stuff."

Taking the time to get to know these student-athletes seems to bring with it a respect for the coach and a desire from the student-athletes to "give it their all." Ruth remembers some of her favorite coaches by stating:

> I've had some really good coaches that knew your parents' names, your siblings, they communicate with everyone, and they could ask you really individual questions, like: "oh, how's your boyfriend doing? How's this class, was the teacher a jerk today?" Really specific stuff and getting into their lives.

By showing such specific respect for the person as a whole, the student-athlete in turn gains

respect for the coach and will gladly reciprocate. In the words of Michelle:

> In my opinion, if your coach has that kind of relationship and shows that he
> actually cares for you, you want to play for him or her, more than anyone…To be
> able to go into his or her office and talk to him or her about anything, and come to
> practice the next day and say to yourself: "I had a great conversation, we are on
> the same page at all times."

High Optimists- **Theme 2: Sets Emotional Tone**

Eight(8) out of 10 high optimistic student-athletes notice that the coach sets the emotional

tone in given situations. This setting of the emotional tone for the team does follow the situation,

but this theme is included in this category of proactive behaviors due to the fact that the student-

athletes agree that consistency in expression is key. The student-athletes state that they feed off

how the coach approaches situations and balance seems to be important. As an individual,

Rachel, a tennis player, states:

> For me I think I respond better to calm and composed because my emotions tend
> to get really high throughout matches so I think it's good when a coach balances
> that out. I think that helps because for me I think I play better when I'm relaxed,
> so she is really good at helping us do that.

While Michael, a member of a baseball team, states:

> In practice, I love him being passionate about it, but almost not as much as in a
> game; not full out "go get it" attitude, but passionate about development,
> passionate about getting better… And during a game is when it's "right now", that
> is what we practice for and I think it's easily burned out if there is that passionate
> and high intensity instructions coming from the coach in practice. If you get a
> high intensity practice, I'm going to get tired. That's why I like a calmer coach in
> practice because in practice you're working on your skills. Yeah, I don't want that
> [much pressure in practice].

As mentioned, the student-athletes will reflect how the coach presents her or himself, and the coach's expressed emotion can have a great effect on the overall mood of the team. In the words of Sandra and Steven:

> You don't want a coach that will dangle things over your head. Like with fitness, if you do bad you're going to run, you're just going to run. And it's just holding it over your head, you don't like coaches like that. You don't want to think about the punishment all the time, you want to actually enjoy what you're doing.

> I think I like the expressive a little more. I like that in a coach…I mean, when it comes to expressing just being just as excited as the players are when things are going good; and the head coach has to really show that he can keep himself composed when things are going bad.

High Optimists- **Theme 3*: Allows for Athlete Initiative**

Six(6) out of the 10 interviewed student-athletes express a preference for a coach that allows for the athletes to express themselves in their own way within the given guidelines. While it is typically unorthodox to include a theme in qualitative research that comprises only 60% of those interviewed, the reason for this theme's inclusion is that the six student-athletes that mentioned this preference were all of the female, high optimistic student-athletes that were interviewed. It seems that a coach who occasionally gives a general outline of expectations and goals for an activity, but allows room for personal expression of style, will challenge these female student-athletes and will encourage creativity. Michelle and Sarah state:

> I think it is important to know the basics, but as far as players getting better it is based on creativity. We can do all the drills in practice, but if you're not able to take that and implement your own things into the game, it is just going to be just bland and boring. So I think that building your own skills and ideas into the game makes you so much of a better player. Yeah, a coach that allows room for people to make their own of what he says. He can say something, but it our responsibility to build off of it and make it more complex.

> I think at first I've always been a person to tell me what to do, tell me how to do it: this way, that way, but I think the older you get, you just want your coach to

give you a broad spectrum of things to do and then you just kind of figure it out
on your own.

And indeed when the sport is of a more individual nature, this room for personal expression

becomes almost essential as Margaret, a tennis player, states:

He tells you what to do, he tells you what the game plan should be, the winning
one, and you do it, yes; but you cannot do it all the time because when you're on
the court playing a match you have only yourself there, and the ball. Even if he
tells you exactly what to do before the match, again he's hoping that you will still
do 10% of your own thing. And if you will be confident about this 10%, you will
win the match, because you can never use only one game plan. Even if he gives
you several ones, still you need to use something of yours.

High Optimists- **Theme 4: Maintains Authority**

While showing care and allowing for personal expression seem to be important to high

optimistic student-athletes, nine (9) out of the 10 interviewed agree that a coach must maintain

her or his position with clarity. It seems that catering to individuals can only go so far in how

effective a coach will be in the long term. While delving deeper into preferred behaviors, Sarah

offers: "Just how relatable they can be, but not too much where I feel like you're my best friend,"

followed by Steven's description of: "Definitely a healthy mixture of firm but relaxed about

stuff; lets everyone have fun but still maintains control of everything…yeah, balanced,

yeah…Very easy to approach but at the same time makes it certain that you know he is the

leader." Such a statement may be easy to make, but again balance seems to be key in the

perceptions of high optimistic student- athletes. Ruth and Sandra shed light on the importance of

this balance by stating:

I think any leader needs to be leading, and can't be complacent and just let
everyone do what they want to do because a lot of people might slack off. So you
definitely need someone there that's watching and making sure everything is
getting done the way it should be, but I definitely think there should be a lot of
discussion between the coach [and athlete].

Someone who is understanding of other people's situations, but also needs to be the leader/ enforcer, but at the same time doesn't need to be a hard-ass all the time. It's nice to have a coach that has guidelines and rules because it's important to have a group or team on track. Say you have a coach stepping into practice that doesn't know how to control the team, and so it is just a loose practice and it is not as beneficial as having a more intense practice. But at the same time, you don't need to be on each other's cases 24/7, it is nice to have some relaxation to it, but at the same time you want a coach that has control. You don't want somebody who doesn't have control of the situation.

Category II: Proactive Behaviors- *Low Optimists*

Below are the themes that emerged following interviews with 11 low optimistic student-athletes.

Low Optimists- **Theme 1: Balances Team/ Individual Emotions and Adapts to Individuals/ Situations**

All 11 low optimistic student-athletes state a preference for a coach that is able to read the emotions of the team, the situation, or an individual and act as almost a counter-weight. Calm when the team is nervous, "fired-up" when the team or individual is too relaxed, giving instruction when the athletes look confused, and motivating when events are going downhill are all ideas found within the interviews. Jennifer says that she prefers in a coach:

A mixture of both [exuberant and composed], because there's definitely moments where it's well deserved for a clipboard to be thrown, but then there's some moments when you really just need their help. So, I think like a mix between the two, or to have a head coach who is one way and an assistant coach who is another way to balance it out.

This ability to maintain an overall balance according to the situation seems to help these student-athletes maintain their own focus. According to Thomas it is important to read the situation because: "Whether he gives confidence or chews us out I think it's both motivation to do better

and stay focused, because sometimes we'll lose focus and it's more paying attention to detail," while Carol follows with:

> If we take timeouts, I want them to say something because I know, sometimes they just say: "okay, calm down, breath," which is good at times, but then there's some times where I'm thinking: "okay, talk to us, give us something," because it gets to those high intense moments, and honestly I think all we need sometimes is those calming words, or instructions like: "focus just on this," and then we're just thinking: "okay, we [indistinguishable] and then everything falls together," so I kind of like instructive timeouts. But also, just if we're freaking out, to just say: "okay, just calm down."

In order to provide this provide this counter-weight, or this balance, William states simply that he prefers a coach who has the: "Ability to separate their emotions from the rest of the team."

Low Optimists- **Theme 2: Fosters Positive Attitude and Athlete Independence**

While maintaining an emotional balance within the team is important, it seems that doing so in a positive manner is of equal importance according to eight (8) of the 11 interviewed. Showing excitement to be present everyday helps create an environment from which the student-athletes can feed, and in turn lends to their own motivation to be present everyday as William states: "Definitely upbeat and motivating. Body language, and attitude [can be motivating]. Sometimes you can tell whenever you coach doesn't really seem into it, or vice-a-versa you can tell when they're rearing to go, and either kind of rubs off."

Presenting a positive exterior seems also to help low optimistic student-athletes brush off a poor performance and move onto the next one as Patricia states: "I want my coach to be most of all positive, no matter how we perform. And I think that's important that she's always positive even if I played a bad match, as long as I have a good attitude." Such positivity appears to allow the student-athletes to arrive at a positive outlook as well.

An aspect of fostering a positive attitude seems to be giving the individual student-athletes space and independence. The general consensus is that having a coach that is always watching, analyzing, and criticizing will only create an environment of worry and unease. Kevin and Carol describe their preferences as:

> A coach that doesn't constantly look at you and everything you do, and try to control every aspect of your game. Balanced is the word I'm looking for. Somebody that you know is the authority, but will let you express yourself if you need to.

> Being able to be positive, and uniting the team, but being a good part of pushing: the determination and stuff, but where you can also relate to the players. Knows the line of pushing the players too hard and getting them to where they are the best they can be. Finding that balance.

William provides a good summarization of creating a positive environment and its lasting effects in describing a coach who does not foster positivity:

> My head coach in high school, probably the worst coach I've ever had, he was just really detached and he was really emotionally and mentally frustrated with our performance and certain individuals and it definitely showed and didn't do anything to help the team. I still to this day don't really care for him.

Low Optimists- **Theme 3: Acts as Parental Figure**

Before this theme is described, I must describe how I, the lead researcher, view "parental figures". A parental figure is someone who: sets the standards and expectations of behavior, accounts for her or his own actions and holds people accountable for their actions, tries to show empathy and understanding of individual situations, is emotionally ever-present, and simultaneously hopes for and demands the best from people. Eight (8) of 11 low optimistic student-athletes described a preference for a coach who acts in this manner. "Somebody that's not just there to do their job, somebody that can be there for me," as Brian describes when discussing optimal leadership behaviors. Carol follows aptly with:

He's almost a dad figure to where we know he cares about us and we can go to him if we need to, and he's there for us, and he always says if something were to happen: "I want to be the first one you call, because if I need to get you out of trouble or I just need to make sure you're okay, I want to know and be there for you guys." so I think that puts a lot of trust from us into him and helps us respect him a lot, and it's nice to know that he has our back too.

While these student-athletes do wish for their coaches to be caring and understanding, they also want a coach that is willing to demand their best as well as maintain role-clarity. Patricia and Kevin state:

She's a really good role-model because she is always asking us how we feel, how we're doing. She's always very personal with us, but at the same time she is good at being on top of us, being our boss at the same time.

I think a leader should be respected by the team for one, and I think that a leader should be a person you can talk to about certain things and tell you the truth. Like how you're playing on the field or how you're doing in school. And they're not going to sugar coat it or nothing to make you feel better, they're going to tell you what you need to do to be better.

Category III: Reactive Behaviors

While putting forth an effort to create a particular environment is important, according to the student-athletes interviewed how a coach responds to uncontrollable external events is of equal importance. A coach cannot control every piece of a situation, and must therefore develop effective reactive behaviors. The following are the preferences that arose following the interviews with the high optimistic student-athletes regarding this category.

High Optimists- **Theme 1: Constructive/ Pointed Feedback**

Eight (8) of the 10 high optimists mention that getting to the point with coaching feedback is of primary importance. Mistakes will be made, high level student-athletes will

attempt new methods, and coaches will see success. The high optimists used the words "honesty"

and "truth" often when describing how they prefer a coach to approach them with feedback.

Sarah states:

> I wouldn't say blunt, but I guess really honest. I don't like coaches that sugar coat
> things. If they would just tell me the truth that would be great, I mean no need to
> degrade, but if they can just say it, then say it. Same thing when I'm doing really
> well, don't sugar coat and make me feel amazing, just like: "hey that was great,
> great job."

Hidden within several of the student-athletes statements is a preference for the coach to separate

the subject of the feedback from the person; summed by Quinn saying that: "I mean, be mad at

what was done wrong, but not at the individual." In addition, high optimists show an interest in

hearing a positive piece of information from their coach regarding their performance even if

there are mistakes to correct. In the words of Ruth and Rachel:

> I want to hear what I did wrong, I don't want to hear "that sucked," but I want to
> hear something like you're turn was really bad, just something really specific.
> And then some positive feedback, like if there is something we've been working
> on in practice. Like that constructive criticism without all the insults.

> Even if it's a practice, the coach says: "okay, here's what went well in practice
> today; here's what when bad; here's what we need to do better." And being
> positive, but hard, to push you. Make you be your best.

High Optimists- **Theme 2: Acts Decisively to Maintain Athlete Focus**

Eight (8) out of 10 high optimists mention a preference for a coach that can act decisively

when their focus slips or complacency is evident in their performance. A coach that can read

such a situation and act quickly, sometimes in a stark manner, seems to help these student-

athletes when they are dealing with difficult circumstances or when they are simply becoming

too comfortable in competition. When describing an instance of optimal leadership, Margaret

recalls:

> I had a great relationship with one of my coaches and sometimes when I played
> bad, he would just extend that belief. I remember this match I was losing 3-luv,
> and at that score my coach just left and I won the match. And he knew that would
> be the right thing to do because he knew I would get the point at 3-luv; he knew I
> would start proving myself and him that he wasn't supposed to leave.

And when performance is flowing Michael states that:

> Even when I'm doing well I still like my coach to get after me a little bit. Not ride
> me, but just help me not get complacent, because complacency for me is the
> easiest thing to fall into. When things are going good, you can kind of fall back
> and think it is coming easy, but if you have somebody that is driving you and
> working you on your weaknesses or making your strengths even better it really
> helps.

Occasionally there is a need for drastic action, or actions that fall outside of normative behavior,

from the coach or coaches. When discussing past situations in which his coaches led optimally

Paul describes a specific game. During the interview Paul stated that his head coach was

typically calm while it was the assistant coach who tended toward exuberance, however:

> I remember this game where [head coach] came in kicking and screaming because
> we got destroyed in the first half, and then [our assistant coach] comes in, he was
> just standing there the whole time, coach leaves and… he just drew up a game
> plan and everyone just says: "Alright, let's go."

Rarely in sport does everything go according to plan, and high optimistic student-athletes express

a preference for a coach that is able and willing to grab their attention in order to return their

focus toward their performance in the difficult situations.

High Optimists- **Theme 4: Encourages**

Following a poor performance or a lack of execution eight (8) of the 10 high optimists

report that they wish their coach to show encouragement and belief in them. These Division I

student-athletes know they are of a high skill level; however, almost every athlete will have an "off day" or occasionally feel as if they might be out of their depth. Having a coach that takes the time to assert her or his belief in the athletes' ability seems to re-assert that belief in the athletes themselves. Rachel states that in tough times she prefers a coach: "Just being supportive, because I know a lot times coaches like to be hard, tough people, but at the same time it is awesome to have a supportive coach because they're leading you and building you up." Steven follows that by saying:

> When it is going bad more of just keeping everyone together rather than folding under the pressure because when things go bad people get into a bad habit of trying to critique themselves too much and I think that the biggest thing for the coach is to let everyone know that we are good. Just simple stuff like that, little reminders that things are okay. A little bit of encouragement.

Having gotten to where these student-athletes are is reportedly no simple task, and each one of them faced a journey of increasing skill levels. While recalling a favorite coach Michelle told a story of her own rise:

> I had been on the C team, which is the 3rd team in the club, and then I worked my way up to the B team, was on the B team for quite a while, and then I got the chance to play with the A team. So I was playing with the big people now, and I didn't know what I was getting myself into, I was really nervous. So, I got to the team and I had this coach, and he worked with me on the simple skills like juggling and ball movement, and just basic skills that I should have known if I was to be on the A team. And I learned it quick, and he helped me understand that it was fine, and he didn't pressure me, and he didn't make me feel like I was one of the worst on the team, or that I was a newcomer. He made me feel like I had been on that team and once I got those basic skills and built off of it on my own, and he to this day is so proud and makes me understand that I worked for all of this for myself, he just helped me on the way. That's the best coach I ever had because he gave me the basic steps and saw me grow from there. He was always encouraging. And he knew how to coach and how to be there for his players.

Within the various statements of the high optimistic group was a preference for the emotional aspect of encouraging as these student-athletes describe how the words and expressions that their coach uses are conducive to them re-gaining belief and confidence in themselves so that they may move forward.

Category III: Reactive Behaviors- *Low Optimists*

Below are the emergent themes following interviews with the low optimistic group of student-athletes.

Low Optimists- **Theme 1: Responds Quickly to Negative Situations**

A coach that can tell when events are going poorly for the team is of course essential in the sport world, but nine (9) of the 11 low optimists report that reaction time in negative situations is as important as what the coach actually does. A coach that can notice when the emotions of the team have turned to negative and will respond without hesitation seems to be a great help to these student-athletes in "pushing through" the negativity. While the low optimistic group did express a preference for an environment that fosters independence it seems there is little concern for that come competition, and these student-athletes express a desire for a coach that will take matters into her or his own hands without waiting for the student-athletes to regain composure. While discussing past leadership situations in which their coach led optimally Kimberly, Joseph, and Jennifer give these examples of fast action with a specific goal:

> There have been times where we've had a bad meet or bad practice and afterwards…we don't meet after every practice but sometimes we meet afterwards and the coach just says: "okay, I know everyone's tired and you've been working hard this week and we obviously did not have a good practice," and everyone knows it, "but I want you guys to come in tomorrow with a better attitude so we can have a better practice, I know you guys can do better." Tell us how it is and try to get us back on track. Try and get us more excited for next practice!

I know one time my senior year our coach took all the starters out, I think we had 8 seniors that started, took all of us out because we were losing to a team that wasn't very good. He put in the JV and they won, which kind of opened our eyes and we started playing really well after that.

I can say my freshman year, we played our rival of all time. So we were playing that rival away and we won the first set, lost the second…well we were in the 5th set, which only goes to 15, and we were down 14-9 in the 5th set. And they clearly thought they had the game, and I don't know what was said exactly, but we called a timeout and the whole team was saying to themselves: "we're not losing to them," and our coach told us something like: "this is your rival, they've been waiting to beat you, and all this and stuff," and we came out to beat them 16-14 in the 5th set. It was basically do-or-die situation and he called it what it was.

Low Optimists- **Theme 2: Straight-forward Feedback with Instruction**

Precision with coaching feedback is noted as very importance according to nine (9) of the 11 interviewed. These student- athletes seem to prefer this precision, or "getting to the point" according to Carol, on both sides of feedback. When an athlete makes a mistake Joseph states: "Sometimes you have to call people out, but calling them out and just going on and on and on, just telling them what they did wrong without really telling them how to fix it or anything like that; that's not good," and Thomas follows by stating: "I think being straight up honest with you. Don't beat around the bush, just tell you straight up how it is, because then if they do beat around the bush then you might be asking yourself question of what were they meaning by that."

The low optimistic group does not want any doubt when the coach points out what is done wrong and gives instructions on how to fix it, but it seems that occasionally avoiding room for doubt also applies when the coach sees an athlete execute well a new action as Jennifer explains: "I prefer more of a hands-on coach. Our coach now he's kind of laid back and he's just like: "repeat that, just repeat it." And I'm just like: "I don't know what I did! So you should tell me."

While several of these student-athletes mentioned that they do not mind an emotionally charged coach when giving specific feedback, all weighed in that detailed information is of much greater importance as Kevin offers: "It doesn't matter to me actually whether the coach is emotionally fired up or calm [with feedback]."

Low Optimists- **Theme 3: Reassures Athlete of Ability**

Eight (8) of 11 low optimists expressed a preference for their coach to be reassuring when performances are not coming, when the student-athlete is having difficulty with a certain technique, or indeed sometimes when the student-athlete does well. Reminders of the fact that the student-athletes have gotten to where they are because of their ability seem to help these low optimistic student-athletes to "bounce back". Maria describes one of her favorite coaches by saying: "If we were playing the first half really bad, he was very good at telling us to calm down and get to basics; just having fun and don't think about all the details because everybody here can play soccer. Get to basics and go from there."

These student-athletes note that a coach who gives the facts and information of their past accomplishment sets the stage for them to regain their confidence. When discussing how a coach's actions have allowed them to rebuild that confidence, Thomas and William offer:

> I like if the coach has confidence in you, if you have a bad day at the plate or in the field, benching you the next game to me might not be the best thing. I think maybe having a talk with you after the game and rebuilding confidence and letting you know that you are capable of doing things well, and then putting you out there the next game, letting you bounce back. So maybe having confidence in your players? Or giving confidence in your players that they are able to do those things.

> I know my senior year in high school one of our assistant coaches actually, he was a pretty good mentor actually just in life, and I guess he understood my personality a little bit. He sat down and talked to me and was like: "hey, I know you're not doing the hottest, you're confidence probably sucks right now, I mean there is no news [of college offers]." He just told me: "you're one of the better

players I've ever seen, so just go out there and play like it." That really helped up
my confidence.

Category IV: Coach Orientation

In addition to having certain traits, creating an certain environment, and reacting in

certain ways a coach also instills within her or his team a certain focus. From past research on

sport leadership these two focus orientations are: relationship-focused, or results-focused. In

qualitative research the typical threshold of respondents with similar statements in order to create

a theme is 75%. With past research and this traditional threshold in mind the high optimistic

group of athletes would seem to prefer a coach who focuses on intrapersonal relationships as

seven (7) of 10 student-athletes report this orientation as marginally more important. Even this

response rate does not cross the 75% threshold of qualitative research and it must be noted that

within this group there are almost 10 unique answers. Therefore, for reasons that will be

explained in further detail in the 'Discussion' section of this document, deeper analysis of the

interviews led to the following themes and sub-themes that emerged within the high optimistic

group regarding preferences for relationship- or results-oriented coaches.

High Optimistic- **Theme 1: Orientations are Separate**

Sub-theme 1- Achieve Results: One (1) high optimistic student-athlete responded with the

preference for a focus on setting goals and achieving results. After discussing the importance of

his coach's influence in his personal growth, Paul paused and offers his personal reason:

> Probably…setting goals and getting results. I mean, I don't know, while I'm in
> some college I want to play beyond college and it's great to have a friend on the
> team and the coach, but at the same time I want to get better, I want to have some
> things when I go to different places and say: "this is what I accomplished."

Sub-theme 2- <u>Relationships:</u> Four (4) high optimistic student-athletes showed a preference for a coach who focuses on developing and maintaining good interpersonal relationships. The student-athletes within this sub-theme seem to acknowledge the already present skill level of themselves, their teammates, and their opponents and therefore believe a coach needs to focus first and foremost on fostering team chemistry. Quinn recalls:

> As soon as we talked about relationships, that situation popped in my head where the coach isn't really approachable. That didn't make playing for him enjoyable because you feel like you don't know who your coach is. I would say it affected my want to be there. The game is the game, you're playing for your guys, and if you don't like your coach you got 9 guys playing for you and you're going to worry about your wins. But I think having a coach that is there, and you know who you're playing for and you know who is leading you it puts the ceiling sky high because they want to be there, they want to play for him… We were a couple games out from winning a national championship, so I mean the bar is just raised for a team that is good and has a coach that cares and is not just a drill instructor.

Sarah follows this sentiment with:

> Um…that's hard. I honestly want both. Do I have to pick one or the other? Would you prefer that? [*Researcher question:* Can you give me why you prefer both?] I prefer both because I think you can't have a coach that just wants goals because if you just have goals then there are certain times when you are playing that things happen: you mentally break down, or you feel like you just can't get through it. If you don't have a personal connection with your coaches to kind of look at them and say: "hey, you got this," like they believe in you, then it is hard for you to push through that. [*Researcher question:* Since you asked, let me challenge you then; if nothing else in the world mattered and you had to choose between the two, which would you say is most preferable to you?] Oh god, I always [indistinguishable]. Probably the coach about the personal relationship. That's the biggest thing. I've been on teams that were very goal oriented and we did not have a good cohesive unit. It just all fell apart.

High Optimists- **Theme 2: Relationships-Results Interaction**

Sub-theme 1- <u>Relationships Lead to Goals/Results:</u> Three (3) of the high optimistic student-athletes state that they believe a coach who fosters good interpersonal relationships within the team will create an environment in which the team can set goals and achieve results together. While this sub-theme is similar to the aforementioned sub-theme regarding a relationship-focused coach, these three (3) student-athletes took the time to specifically mention that it is the relationship within the team that leads to achieving results. Steven and Rachel describe:

> [*Researcher notes:* after asking for clarification of the question] Me personally, I understand the point behind them [goals] but I've just never been a big fan of just setting a bunch of goals as team, or having multiple goals. I just think that on the field and at practice I just think there is only ever one goal: just win. So I never really bought into setting a bunch of goals and trying to achieve all of them differently. I think the more tight-knit your team is, then I think the more they understand that if you just go after that one goal, then it takes care of everything else. If their only goal is to win, then they don't have worry about their batting average because it will be high.

> I think more the relationships, because if you have that good relationship among the team and the coach that leads to achieving goals. So I think it's important for a coach to expect good relationships among the team, and foster those relationships among the team, between the coach and the player, because it leads to achieving your goals. And if you have good team chemistry and good relationships you're going to want to achieve those goals and work hard to achieve them.

Michael's answer, the third statement that falls in this sub-theme, will be examined further in the 'Discussion' section.

Sub-theme 2- <u>Results Lead to Relationships:</u> Two (2) of the high optimists believed that a relationship with the coach would not exist without the presence of goals and results. They both state that once the results start to flow, then the relationship will come almost as a byproduct. As Margaret describes:

I think setting goals and achieving results, because once you start to get the results by practicing with the coach, then you start to trust the person. Once you start to trust this person, then comes the ability to share anything and your relationship is going to be based on that. If you go to the greatest coach, you go to him not to share anything, you go to him to ask him: "can you make me number one in the world?" and he might say: "yes," for example. And you will start working with him, and once the results come, even if it's a small one like if you were 1000 in the world and you become 900, it doesn't seem a big change, but you just start to trust more your coach because you see the result. Then you start to trust more and you start to talk about everything else. It would start with small things and then come to something personal that you never share with anyone.

Ruth's answer, the second statement that falls in this sub-theme, will be examined in further detail in the 'Discussion' section.

Low Optimists

Were these results to keep in mind past sport leadership research on relationship v. results focused coaches and the traditional 75% threshold for qualitative research, then it would seem that seven (7) of the 11 low optimistic student-athletes profess a belief that setting goals and achieving results is of increased or equal importance as fostering relationships. Similar to the results of the high optimistic group, even these seven (7) do not pass the traditional threshold as well as almost each student-athlete giving a unique answer. Upon deeper review of the interviews, the following are the emergent themes and sub-themes in the low optimistic group regarding preferences for a relationship- or results-oriented coach.

Low Optimists- **Theme 1: Orientations are Separate**

Sub-theme 1- Result-focus and Relationship-focus are Equal: Three (3) of 11 low optimistic student-athletes state a belief that the two coaching orientations are separate constructs but are of equal value. While these student-athletes acknowledge that there is some interaction between results and intra-team relationships, they do not seem to believe that a coach who

focuses on one of the orientations will have a direct effect on the other. They seem to prefer a coach who will consider both aspects of a team in equal measure in order to foster an environment of both trust and drive within the athletes. Patricia, William, and Kimberly describe in detail:

> I think it has to be a combination of both because you spend so much time together that it is impossible to have a coach where you wouldn't have a good relationship with them. If you just have a coach who is just purely focused on setting goals and reaching them and not having a personal relationship with you then I feel like maybe the coach will be happy, but the player won't be happy. But at the same time you can't have a coach who would just treat you as if you are her friend or sister, and not have those goals set for you because then it becomes purely relationship and not any result based achievements. And I mean, you need to push yourself to get better. With goals that is what you can do, but you need to have the relationship as well, I mean if I didn't have the relationship with my coach now, I wouldn't have any respect for her. I feel like I need to trust her too, and know that she respects me as well because if there is that mutual respect then you also want to do it for her, not just yourself.

> That's a tough one because I think you need a bit of both. Sports aren't just about performance, it's a lot of life lessons involved and relationship building and everything, but at the same time as a coach your job is to produce results. It's a fine line, one that the coach has to dance around. I think it's a crucial thing to keep a good relationship with the players, because if you lose that then I think you lose all credibility. At the same time, it is your job to get the most out of everyone on your team. For me I guess results, because nobody wants to do bad; but I know myself that I don't have too many issues with developing bad relationships.

> That's a tough one…um…I feel like the best coach I ever had was definitely a mix of both. He was all about the developing the relationship with each of his athletes, but also setting up meetings with us to set goals and keep us focused on those goals. But if I had to pick one I would have to pick the goal setting because you wouldn't be able to reach goals as easily without them. He would set up [one-on-one] meetings outside of practice where we could go and set up whatever goals we wanted to meet, how we were going to meet them, when we wanted meet them by, stuff like that.

Sub-theme 2- <u>Achieving Results:</u> Three (3) of the 11 expressed a preference for a coach who focuses on setting goals and achieving results. All three cited that they believe a coach's job

is to win first and foremost with all else falling into secondary functions. Kevin and Brian answered with certainty:

> Getting results and setting goals. I feel like that is the main picture a coach should be focused on.

> To me, I'm a really competitive person, so if someone sets a goal I always want to try to reach that goal, so probably the second one [setting goals and achieving results] because it will always motivate me to succeed.

Maria's answer, the third that falls in this sub-theme, will be described in further detail in the 'Discussion' section.

Low Optimists- **Theme 2: Relationships-Results Interaction**

Sub-theme 1- Relationships Lead to Goals/Results: Four (4) of 11 in the low optimistic group believe that once good intra-team relationships are there, then the results will start to fall into place as a secondary effect. Thomas answered with certainty: "Personally I think building a good relationship with someone is the better one, because, yes, you can have goals and reach those goals and have team goals and individual goals, but to me you never even reach those goals unless you have good relationships," while Lisa follows with her statement that:

> I think at D-I level, the results are more important, but to get those results you have to be open. Because you have to have that communication and that relationship with your players and that trust and teamwork really. Because it is about teamwork between players and coaches. I think results are what shows and are important at the end, but to get there you have to have that relationship. So the results are 'what' and the relationship is 'how'.

Sub-theme 2- Results Lead to Relationships: One (1) of 11 in the low optimistic group believes that relationships will only come to be once the results are realized. Carol believes that relationships will form naturally once the "business end" of sport is completed by stating:

Definitely setting goals and achieving results. I mean I feel like if you set a goal and then you are achieving results you all are kind of getting closer by doing that. I don't want somebody to just come in here and just be like: "Hey, I want to be your best friend," I want someone that like makes me respect them and I kind of am like: "okay, they mean business, I got to work hard." And then when success starts coming from that I feel like that's when relationships naturally form. First thing is first, I mean business, and then once that happens we can be cool.

Chapter 4

Discussion

The original purpose of this research was to describe in rich detail with a humanistic perspective how high and low optimistic groups of student-athletes perceive preferred leadership behaviors from a coach. Therefore, the research question that drove this study is: what are the preferred leadership behavioral perceptions of high and low optimistic NCAA Division I student-athletes?

Major Findings

Coach Traits

From the interviews several themes regarding preferred coach traits emerged when discussing optimal leadership. Consistent with previous sport leadership research using a trait approach, both high and low optimistic groups consistently identified certain traits that they wish to see in their coach. Stogdill's (1974) relatively early assertion that: if people could be found with certain traits, then they could become leaders, holds true in light of the present research. When combined with the present research, the identified traits by the high and low optimistic groups touch upon all 10 previously noted characteristics that leaders consistently demonstrate: integrity, flexibility, loyalty, confidence, accountability, candor, preparedness, resourcefulness, self-discipline, and patience (Parcels & Coplon, 1995).

Starting with the similarities found in the present study, both groups expressed a preference for a coach that is competent and has a knowledge of their chosen sport that is well beyond their own. Such a trait in a coach is essentially necessary in the world of high level competition (Beam, Serwatka, & Wilson, 2004). Additionally, both high and low optimists

desire a coach that is both aware of the situation and of the individual athletes. In short: a coach that can read the situation well and knows how to get the best from her or his individual athletes is the most effective kind of coach. Following research on sport leadership by Chelladurai & Arnott (1985), Chelladurai, Haggerty, & Baxter (1989), Hersey (1984), and Sherman, Fuller, and Speed (2000), such congruency between both high and low optimistic students-athlete perspectives was to be expected. Some of the resultant themes from this study however, agree with other previous research that comes to the conclusion that the possession of certain traits does not imply optimal leadership, especially when considering individual differences (Beam, Serwatka, & Wilson, 2004; Freakley, et. al, 2012; Tinning, 1982).

Many of the words used by both high and low optimistic groups are similar, such as "motivating", "passionate", and "hardworking". However, there are subtle differences in the phrasing that reveal radical differences in perspective. Some results from this present study touch upon previous research findings when studying feelings of controllability versus learned helplessness within optimistic and pessimistic individuals (Satterfield, 2000; Shearman, et al, 2011). This previous research asserts that optimistic individuals may concentrate their actions at approaching feelings of controllability and that pessimistic individuals focus on avoiding learned helplessness.

With those previous research results in mind, the statements by the high optimistic student-athletes in this study reveal that they prefer a coach that instills within them a desire and confidence to apply their very best. A coach that exhibits evidently her or his own desire to be a part of the game as well as having high standards seems to impart a drive for high optimistic student-athletes to "give their all". The low optimistic group of student-athletes in this study show preferences for a coach that will provide an example for them to follow. A coach that is

able to epitomize the work necessary to prosper at the D-I level of competition and convey such necessity in an effective manner seems to make the low optimistic student-athletes want to emulate that effort in search of success. In terms of the trait approach, Steven's statement that: "Yeah, a coach that more or less personifies the team," seems to be most effective for a team of wide ranging personalities by exhibiting hard work and expressing enjoyment in that work while demanding an athlete's best effort and communicating the reasons for doing so.

Proactive Behaviors

Several themes became evident regarding a coach that sets a preferred environment after analyzing both high and low optimistic groups' interviews. This category was given the name of 'proactive behaviors' after reviewing the transcripts of both groups while discussing preferred coach behaviors as well as past leadership situations in which a coach led optimally. This labelling is due to these student-athletes' consistent references concerning how their preferred coach would approach different situations. The emergent themes from both high and low optimistic groups connect with four areas of leadership behaviors found by Chelladurai and Saleh (1980), and Zhang and Jensen (1997), namely: situational considerations, autocratic behaviors, democratic behaviors, and social support behaviors.

First and foremost within both groups was a preference for a coach that makes an effort to understand her or his student-athletes outside of the sport environment. An individual's concerns, needs, struggles, and desires are present for reasons known to that individual, and a coaches that offers an "open door policy", meaning that their student-athletes can approach them with anything at almost any time, seems to (a. increase that student-athlete's respect for the coach as a person, and (b. increase that student-athlete's desire to contribute positively to the team. With regards to differences between this study's two groups, low optimistic student-

athletes take this preference one step further than the high optimists in that they profess a wish for their coach to give them guidance in addition to showing care for their whole person. These low optimistic individuals seem to favor a coach that will not only ask them how they are doing, but will also tell them how they might become the best person they can be. The results of this study highlight the importance for a coach that fosters intrinsic motivation within her or his athletes (Amorose, & Horn, 2000).

Within this intrinsic motivation comes the student-athletes' need to feel that what they bring as an individual will be both good and beneficial to the team. Inherent in every action is a contribution, and it seems that part of a coach's job is to direct that the student-athlete's contribution, both on and off the field, in a positive direction. The high optimistic group in this research describes preferred coach traits which imply that these student-athletes already possess a confidence that what they can do will benefit the team. For a coach, one that makes obvious her or his position of authority in terms of the team's overall goals and philosophy seems to provide a conduit through which they can apply that confidence and effort. Put into negative terms, a coach that does not show assuredness in her or his own ability nor belief in her or his own views of the sport might make the high optimistic student-athletes question the purpose of doing their best for that coach. Additionally, the high optimistic theme *Allows for Athlete Initiative,* which includes only the high optimistic, female student-athletes, points to potential gender differences within the personality disposition of optimism. While the current study did not put in place the methodology to make definitively such a statement, such a possibility is present and is discussed further for future research. Such a difference between male and female high optimistic student-athletes will be further discussed for future research. The low optimistic group of student-athletes in this study expressed a desire for a coach that allows them to be themselves. Part of a coach's

job is to analyze and correct an athlete's specific technical aspects of execution; however, a coach that is consistently overbearing might decrease the confidence of low optimistic individuals. These student-athletes seem to view a coach not so much as a last resort when it comes to application of effort as the overarching statement of: let me try and fix what I am doing first; if I cannot figure it out, then help me. These results are reminiscent of an exploration of coaching power by Laios, Theodorakis, and Gargalianos (2003). These researchers describe several aspects of power that a coach might fulfill when leading a team: *legitimate power, reward power, coercive power, expert power,* and *referent power. Legitimate power* approaches the coach's actual position and how athletes respond to the title of 'coach'. The expression of *reward power* is reminiscent of positive reinforcement in that a coach that can effectively encourage desirable behaviors from her or his athletes will receive from those athletes their best performance. *Coercive power* touches upon punishment and a coach's ability to effectively discourage improper behaviors. *Expert power* follows a coach's own experiences, knowledge, and successes within the sport, while *referent power* comes from the coach gaining the personal trust and belief from their charges. A coach that recognizes these five types of power with regard to individual differences within the team seems to be the most preferred in general by both high and low optimistic individuals.

A large aspect of allowing confidence to flow and encouraging the application of effort seems to be a coach's expressed emotions. The low optimistic group in this study states a preference for a coach that will approach any situation with a positive attitude. These student-athletes refer to a coach that responds in a balanced approach to the team's emotions and behaviors, all while maintaining that positive outlook, will be most effective. Essentially, low optimistic student-athletes seem to prefer a coach that presents what is needed for a best

performance in response to how the team is actually acting in a given situation. For the high optimistic student-athletes it seems that the coach's evident emotions incite within them the feelings necessary to approach a given situation. In other words, a coach that approaches a game or practice with over-confidence might lead to her or his high optimistic athletes becoming complacent, while a coach that approaches a game or practice with enthusiasm for the challenge might lead to those same athletes becoming "pumped-up" and ready for the ahead challenge.

These results in the 'proactive behavior' category touch upon two differences between optimistic and pessimistic individuals found in past research. The first is the difference between how an optimistic individual might explain an event in comparison to a pessimistic individual (Abramson, et al, 2000; Dember, Helton, Matthews, & Warm, 1999). According to descriptions following previous research, a high optimistic athletes will view negative events as changeable, external, and specific while viewing positive events as a result of personal effort. It seems that the interviewed student-athletes in the high optimistic group would agree when perceiving their coach. Individuals of a pessimistic disposition are said to view negative events as unchangeable, internal, and global while viewing positive events as due to external factors such as luck or following another's actions. While the low optimistic group of student-athletes in this study may agree with perceptions of negative events, when looking at the present results it seems that they do indeed feel more or less responsible for positive outcomes in terms of performance. The second difference highlighted by past research is how optimists interpret information as opposed to pessimists (Abramson, et al, 2000; Satterfield, 2000). The results from this study fall in line with previous findings that pessimistic individuals respond quickly to negative self-referent information (Seligman, et al, 1990) and will experience more negative emotions in response to negative situations. In the context of performance it is the coach that provides the example to

follow. Lastly, the high optimistic group in this study seems to agree with previous research in that they experience decreased emotional consequences following negative events as well as responding to external events in kind. In the context of performance it is the coach that sets the emotional tone for how to approach situations for her or his high optimistic athletes. These differences note a need for a coach to express positivity, to allow individual expression, and to show a desire to deal with the task at hand while occasionally providing spoken guidance for how to realize potential.

Reactive Behaviors

For a coach to set a certain environment is important, but of equal importance is how that coach responds to events that she or he cannot control. Several themes arose from discussion with both high and low optimistic student-athletes about preferred behaviors and past situations in which a coach led optimally. The statements given by both high and low optimistic relate to three of the areas of leadership behaviors identified by Chelladurai and Saleh (1980), and Zhang and Jensen (1997), namely: situational considerations, training and instruction behaviors, and positive feedback behaviors. The results of this research reflect findings by previous research that point toward several coaching behaviors that are generally effective, but also that some coaching behaviors work best depending on the individual athletes (Beam, Serwatka, & Wilson, 2004; Burke, et al, 2006; Sherman, Fuller, & Speed, 2000; Tinning, 1982).

To start with the similarities, both high and low optimistic groups of student-athletes expressed a preference for a coach that will be honest and straight-forward with performance feedback. "Getting to the point", "not sugar coating things", and "not beating around the bush" are several colloquialisms used in describing how these student-athletes wish their coach to approach them should their execution be either poor or good. A clear analysis from the coach of

what was done well or poorly along with specific instructions on how to correct or improve technique is the preferred feedback behavior. Additionally, both groups express a preference for a coach that takes quick, decisive action when total team performance is below average. One aspect of competition is responding to uncertain situations and results (Zaccaro, & Horn, 2003), and the student-athletes in this study desire a coach that can provide a "shock to the system" in difficult circumstances. In light of especially poor team performances, it seems that a coach that can act against her or his normative behavior might return a student-athlete's focus to the task at hand. A coach that brings their student-athletes to reality in both feedback and drastic action seems to get the best out of both high and low optimists.

There is one subtle difference in phrasing between the high and low optimistic athletes that reveals a deep differences in perspective. At first glance, *Theme 3: Encourages* for high optimists and *Theme 3: Reassures Athlete of Ability* seems a mere difference in semantics; however, upon deeper analysis these themes highlight preferences of focus. The high optimistic student-athletes seem to prefer a coach who will focus on instilling confidence of the athlete in the moment so that the athlete can succeed moving forward; a sort of present-focus aimed at success for the future. The low optimistic student-athletes seem to prefer a coach who will focus on reminding the athlete of past successes so that the athlete can succeed in the moment; which suggests more of a past-focus aimed at returning the athlete to the present. The results in this category connect to past research findings that optimistic individuals tend to engage in behaviors that approach confidence while pessimistic individuals tend to engage in behaviors that avoid doubt (Carver, & Scheier, 2002).

Coach Orientation

The category of 'coach orientation' and the emergent themes within it was by far the most convoluted. The interview question itself seemed to cause the most confusion amongst both high and low optimistic student-athletes. Previous research suggests that there are two distinct focuses that guide a coach's overall behavior in attempting to express that focus: relationship-focused and results/ task- focused (Burke, et al, 2006; Chelladurai, & Carron, 1974; Chelladurai, & Saleh, 1980; Freakley, et al, 2012). This past research does suggest that the two focuses necessarily interact on occasion; however, following the interviews with the student-athletes in both groups there may be the possibility that a more integrative conceptualization is needed from the perspective of the athlete. The fourth interview question was:

-Which of the following styles best describes your optimal coach:

     A coach who focuses on developing and maintaining good interpersonal relationships?

     A coach who focuses on setting goals and achieving results. Why?

It is difficult to express in writing the struggle many of the interviewed student-athletes experienced in answering this question. Out of 21 interviewed participants, only a handful were able to give a certain answer without mentioning the utmost importance of both orientations, seeming exasperated, bumbling, going on numerous asides, making false starts, or entirely contradicting what they had said throughout the interview or even within their given answer to the question.

     There are three student-athlete answers in particular that highlight this struggle well. Ruth, a high optimist, paused for approximately five (5) seconds with an inquisitive facial expression before starting her answer with: "Um…I feel like I'm contradicting what I just said, but definitely setting goals and achieving results. I want someone that is driven, I mean the

interpersonal stuff is very important, but I feel like that is kind of a means of getting to the second one [developing and maintaining good interpersonal relationships].” Until that point in the interview, Ruth had been describing how important it is for the coach to encourage strong interpersonal relationship within the team and how such relationships foster her own drive to do well. Maria, a low optimist, exhibited great uncertainty with how to approach the question and answered in a defensive manner. She states: “I'm guessing…setting goals. I mean, yes. I want him to have goals. Yes. Even though I like a coach that can be personal with me, I also want him to do his job and help all the players get better. I want a coach that wants to win, and he wants to set his goal and push the players to make it to that goal.” While Maria did eventually settle on an answer, she did so as if she were doubting herself and her perceptions of what goals and results contribute to a team. Perhaps the starkest example of how the student-athlete perspective might be dissonant from past research findings is the statement that Michael, a high optimist, offers:

> You play to win the game. So a coach that sets goals and worries about the results, sets goals and achievements, a coach that does that is going to make sure that you are going to be best prepared for a game. I feel like he's not going to set goals without making sure his team is ready for those goals. I would like a coach that sets goals and worries about the achievement more. But on the flip side, building the relationships and having a tightknit group is beneficial as well. But to answer your question, the sets goals and achievements. The perfect answer for me to that last question would be a mixture of both. If a coach is there that wants to build relationships and wants to get to know his players and is really caring in that aspect then it makes us want to achieve those goals that he sets out for us. But if a coach is set on the goals and achievements, he is also going make sure we're developed enough and we have practiced and are ready for those games situations. So I would like a coach that is a mixture of both.

Michael starts his answer with certainty, and then proceeds in a circle to describe how beneficial interpersonal relationships are to a team. He then comes back to his stated preference for a coach that focuses on setting goals and achieving results before once again highlighting the importance

of a coach that knows her or his athletes on a personal level and fosters good relationships. He finally settles on a compromise between the two focuses. Indeed, upon further analysis one could make the argument that the overall meaning of his statement is the opposite of his declared preference. Such an argument is found in Michael's belief that his preferred coach will not set goals without first ensuring that the athlete is developmentally able to take on the challenge.

A potential key to understanding further these student-athletes' perceptions of achieving results and the importance of interpersonal relationships may be found in Carver and Scheier's (2002) discussion of optimism, pessimism, and self-regulation. These authors posit that an individual bases her or his actions, efforts, and perceptions from a hierarchy of goals to which she or he ascribes. In that discussion there are "lower-level" goals that are more task-oriented, specific, and time-related such as: buying the correct groceries for dinner tonight, following the rules of the road in order to arrive at a place safely, or having the correct technique in order to score a goal within the allotted time-frame. There are also "higher-level" goals that are more value-oriented, abstract, and person-related. Examples of this type of goal are: be a good communicator, be a trustworthy person, or be a tenacious person. Individuals adopt and strive for "lower-level" goals in order to fulfill her or his "higher-level" goals, a sort of 'means to an end', while the adoption of "higher-level" goals follow a number of factors including, but not limited to: upbringing, personal values, emotional state, and the perceived contribution of the "lower-level" goals in light of what happens in reality after achieving them, which in other words is the individual's view of whether or not succeeding with those "lower-level" goals resonates with her or his "higher-level" goals. Relative to the results of this present study, Carver and Scheier's (2002) discussion raises several questions: on which level do achieving results versus interpersonal relationships fall according to the individual? Does the student-athlete wish to be

successful in sport or be empathetic within the team? How did the student-athlete come to aspire to such goals? How can a coach identify her or his athletes' individual hierarchies? And how can a coach best contribute to such goals?

Overall, there seems to be two overarching factors of team dynamics that will foster a student-athlete's best performance following the present research: trust and respect. All of the interviews taken in totality point to the preference for a coach that is trusted by their student-athletes. Both groups show a want for a coach that will do what she or he says, that can effectively guide them towards becoming better athletes and better persons, and will be there for the athletes in their times of need. As well, they want a coach that trusts them to do what is necessary for success and fulfill the expectations set by the coach. Additionally, both groups want a coach whom they can respect. A coach gains this respect by having a vast knowledge of and experience within the game, having a clear vision for the direction of the team, and will show empathy toward individual needs and circumstances. As with trust having to go both ways, the student-athletes want to feel respected by their coach in what they have to offer to the team and for how they as individuals came to develop their particular perspectives. Whether or not the student-athlete upholds her or his end of the bargain is up to that student-athlete, but following the results of the present research a coach that drives the team with goals while relating the importance of those goals to both the team and individual athletes seems to be the most preferred by both high and low optimistic student-athletes.

Limitations of the Study

The present research was geared toward differences in an individual optimism levels; therefore, it did not give consideration to potential gender differences. In light of some of the results from this study, such a subject may be worth exploring in further detail and is discussed

in possible future research. As well, the perspectives given in this research are limited to student-athletes enrolled in an NCAA Division I collegiate program. There is the potential for differing perceptions of preferred leadership behaviors according to level of competition, be it in the professional world of sport or the youth level. Again, possibilities for future research are below discussed. Lastly, type of sport (individual v team) was not accounted and there remains the possibility that personality differences within different types of sport can influence preferences of coaching behaviors.

Implications of the Study

The purpose of this research was two-fold: 1) to explore in detail how individual student-athletes perceive preferred coaching behavior, and 2) to open the door to future research potentials. Regarding the first purpose, there are two major, significant findings in this study. First, that personality disposition does contribute to differing perceptions of preferred coaching behaviors regardless of the demands in a performance-centered environment. Some of the results of this research do highlight similar preferences of both high and low optimistic student-athletes, but a further look at those results show the similarities to fall among more task-specific behaviors and the actual attributes of the coach. Essentially, the similarities are in a realm outside of the student-athletes' influence once they are decided. The differences between the two groups touch upon personal perspectives such as: feelings of confidence, ability to contribute, and ascription to purpose (the team). In light of previous research, the differences found in the current study connect well with Deci and Ryan's (2002) self-determination theory (SDT). The SDT outlines three basic psychology needs per individual that might be seen in the presented differences: *competence* (ability to contribute), *relatedness* (ascription to purpose), and *autonomy* (feelings of confidence). The present research cannot use the SDT as an explanation for these

emergent differences as it was not installed as a framework nor considered in the qualitative interview questions; however, the present results alone point to such a potential and possible future research is below discussed. The second significant finding is for a coach's perspective. Assuming that an NCAA Division I coach has attained her or his position through competence and passion for the game, the over-riding sentiment following the interviews with both groups is: know your athletes. While the particular application of actions, also known as 'operations', may be different within this research's results, a coach's plans for how to get the best from her or his athletes, otherwise known as 'tactics', as well as the purpose for doing so, otherwise known as 'strategy', remain consistent. Taken from the top down, a coach that acknowledges individual differences will show effort to learn her or his athletes' preferences and then act according to what best motivates those athletes.

Potentials for Future Research

The second purpose of this study was to find more topics worth further research. One is the gender difference evident in the high optimistic group with regards to the theme in 'proactive behaviors' of *Allow Athletes Initiative*. This theme emerged within the high optimistic, female student-athletes and the reasons for such ask for further inspection. A second has to do with level of competition. Do the present research's results apply to professional athletes? How do younger athletes perceive coaching behaviors? How might youth coaches contribute to an individual adopting an optimistic or pessimistic explanatory style with regards to the sport world? These questions are worth exploring. While this present research points to differing preferences for coaching behavior according to personality traits the type of sport may be another factor in those preferences and calls for further research. The present results as well call for more exploration in the potential explanatory power of the SDT in terms of an individual's perceived preference for

coaching behavior. How have an individual's three basic psychological needs been fostered that leads to these preferences? What do… And finally, there might be a need to look further into the relationship- v. results/ task-focused orientation of the coach from the perspective of an athlete. Quantitatively speaking, it is simple to see a number and decide that it is what the athlete prefers. What might not be as simple is noticing the struggle with which an athlete chooses a particular number on a survey. Further qualitative investigation into this struggle might shine more light on how individuals perceive these two focuses, a process which may involve delving into how athletes interpret relationships and results outside of a performance-based context.

APPENDIX A

Delimitations:

- All participants will be NCAA Division I athletes of various sports from a university campus in the southeast
- Participants will be selected conveniently rather than randomly
- Optimism is measured along the continuum of the LOT-R
- Data received across the LOT-R will be split into thirds: low, middle, high
- Participants to be interviewed will be picked from the low and high optimistic scores

Limitations:

- Qualitative descriptions of preferred leadership behaviors will be limited to a high level sporting arena
- Potential gender differences will not be accounted for

Assumptions:

- Participants will answer survey items truthfully
- Participants will understand all survey items and interview questions
- Participants will have seen examples of effective leadership
- Participants will have a conceptualization of what they prefer from a leader
- Participants will avoid social desirability when describing preferred leadership

Research Question:

- What are the preferred leadership behavioral perceptions of high and low optimistic NCAA Division I student- athletes?

Definitions:

- Leadership: "the behavioral process of influencing individuals and groups toward set goals" (Barrow, 1977 p. 232)

- Optimism: Those who are high in optimism attribute bad events in her or his life to unstable, external, or very specific causes and research has also found the concept to be positively correlated with such ideas as hope, self-efficacy, and resiliency (Kardum & Hudek-Knezevic, 2012; Khan, Siraj, & Li, 2011).

- Pessimism: Pessimistic individuals interpret negative life events as stable, internal, and global. These individuals tend to feel that negative consequences will follow negative events and that a negative event infers that there is something fundamentally wrong with themselves (Abramson, et al, 2000).

APPENDIX B

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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In J. E. Gillham (Ed. 1), *The science of optimism and hope* (pp. 75-98). Philadelphia, PA:
Templeton Foundation Press.

The authors of this chapter provide a review of several aspects of optimism and
pessimism. Definitions and descriptions of both the optimistic and pessimistic
explanatory were provided. The foci of this chapter were the Cognitive Theory of
Depression, and the idea of learned helplessness. Within this framework, the authors
discussed how optimistic and pessimistic intake information, how those differences
contribute to how an individual may respond to feedback, and how those difference
influence an individual's interpretation of negative events. This discourse into the
concepts of optimism and pessimism provide the present research with rationale behind
using the personality disposition of optimism as a potentially differentiating factor in how
individuals perceive preferred leadership behaviors.

Beam, J. W., Serwatka, T. S., & Wilson, W. J. (2006). Preferred leadership of NCAA Division I
and II intercollegiate student-athletes. *Journal of Sport Behavior, 27*(1), 3-17.

This research examined potential differences in preference for leadership behaviors on
several levels. The four variables used are: gender, competition level, task dependence,
and task variability. A total of 408 participants across four NCAA Division I and six
NCAA Division II were measured using the Revised Leadership Scale for Sport (R-LSS).
The researchers used a repeated measures MANOVA to see if any differences in
preference scores existed among the four variables. The results show that: male student-
athletes preferred autocratic behavior and social support behavior; female student-athletes
preferred situational consideration behavior and training and instruction behavior;
independent sport athletes showed greater preference for democratic, positive feedback,
situational consideration, and social support behaviors. There were no significant findings
with regards to level of competition and differences in preferred leadership behavior.
This study provides the present research with rationale as to the potential for different
perspectives of preferred leadership.

Burke, C. S., Stagl, K. C., Klein, C., Goodwin, G.F., Salas, E., & Halpin, S. M. (2006). What
type of leadership behaviors are functional in teams? A meta-analysis. *The Leadership
Quarterly, 17*(3), 288-307.

This meta-analysis looked into the relationship between team leader behavior and team
performance. The study divides leadership behavior into: task-focused and person-
focused. Task-focused behavior is further split into: *transactional*, a leader that praises,
rewards or avoids punishing those who fulfill expectations; *initiating structure*, a leader

that minimizes role ambiguity and conflict; and *boundary spanning*, a leader that behaves to increase resources and the amount/variety of information available to the team. Person-focused is also further split into: *transformational*, leaders that focus on a follower's motivational state and vision through meaningful and creative exchanges; *consideration,* behaviors aimed at creating and preserving team cohesion; *empowerment*, leaders that serve to develop self-management and self-leadership skills; and *motivational*, leaders that create continuous team effort. These differing types of leadership behaviors are the independent variables for this analysis. The dependent variable here is team performance outcomes. The outcomes are split and measured as such: *perceived team effectiveness,* team members' subjective assessments of team performance; *team productivity,* an objective measure that reflects what "items" are produced by the team; and *team learning,* which is another subjective measure of the increase in teamwork capacity and leadership within the team itself. The purpose of this meta-analysis was to identify any particular leadership behavior that have a notable effect on any of the levels of team performance outcomes. Firstly, *boundary spanning*, basically teaching and giving with authority, was shown to be a particularly effective leadership behavior in team performances and I do believe this behavior relates to a more autocratic style of decision-making (in the sense that the leader is the one with the knowledge and resources so the team needs to listen). Second, *empowerment* was shown to have a highly positive effect on both *perceived team effectiveness* and *team learning*. This meta-analysis sets the stage for my own research in that it has found quantitative measures of functional leadership behaviors so that I may look closer into how a leader interprets implementing these behaviors and how important they may view particular behaviors.

Chelladurai, P., & Carron, A. V. (1983). Athletic maturity and preferred leadership. *Journal of Sport Psychology, 5,* 371-380.

The researchers in this article examined potential differences in preferred leadership behaviors with regards to level of competition. They refer to level of competition as athletic maturity. The foci of the authors' were on training and instruction behavior and social support behavior from the leader on the Leadership Scale for Sport (LSS). Four equitable groups of basketball athletes was the sample for this study: midget high school, junior high school, senior high school, and university level. To test for differences, the researchers used a trend analysis using orthogonal polynomials. Findings for training and instruction behavior show a quadratic trend in preference that progressively decreased across the three high school groups, but then increased at the university level. Findings for social support behavior show a linear increase in preference across all four groups. These findings together show that preferences in leadership are subject to the athlete, providing rationale behind the present research searching for potential further differences depending on athlete perspective.

Chelladurai, P., & Saleh, S.D. (1980).   Dimensions of leader behavior in sports: Development of a leadership scale. *Journal of Sport Psychology. 2,* 34-45.

The authors of this article studied several aspects of coaching behavior to include: training and instruction, democratic behavior, autocratic behavior, social support, and positive feedback. The aspects researched in this study were investigated as part of the development and refinement of the Leadership Scale for Sport (LSS). The (LSS) is a 40 item questionnaire divided into five subscales. 13 items relate to Training and Instruction, nine items relate to Democratic Behavior, five items relate to Autocratic Behavior, eight items relate to Social Support, and five items relate to Positive Feedback. This study gives my research will help guide the qualitative interview questions as well as potentially provide a structure for the answers given.

Durham, C. C., Knight, D., Locke, E. A. (1997). Effects of Leader Role, Team- Set Goal Difficulty, Efficacy, and Tactics on Team Effectiveness. *Organizational Behavioral and Human Decision Processes, 72*(2), 203-231.

This study basis its outlook on leadership on one aspect of the concept, that of decision making. The authors present a range from autocratic decisions made by the leader alone, to consultation with subordinates, to joint decision making with subordinates. The continuum of decision making ranges from a *commander*, a leader that uses the information present to make the decision for the group, to a *coordinator*, a leader that encourages communication among participants in order to facilitate a group decision. The purpose of this study is find how the *commander* style and *coordinator* style interact with goal difficulty in effecting a team's quality of strategy and tactics, and in turn, team performance. One particular result seen is that when it came to a task requiring new learning, a *coordinator* style worked more effectively as a presumed result of greater cognitive involvement from all the team members and greater communication. Secondly, the researchers found that leadership role links to performance indirectly rather than directly; they noted that while leaders do influence the direction and goals of the team, one can only influence what is there. In addition, team goal-setting was seen to positively affect performance, but only for teams that used higher quality tactics. Such a finding became especially true for increasingly complex tasks as teams were required to re-adjust their goals. This study relates to my own in that, when it comes to setting goals, a *coordinator* style of leadership is more facilitative toward performance as it takes into account what the team believes they can achieve; once a particular goal is achieved, team efficacy will then increase and in turn lead the team to push themselves toward more and more difficult goals.

Fischer, C. T. (2006). Humanistic psychology and qualitative research: affinity, clarification, and invitations. *The Humanistic Psychologist, 34*(1), 3-11.

The author's purpose in this article was to provide encouragement to humanistic psychology to participate in qualitative research. While the author is not attempting to dismiss quantitative research, he believes there can be a disconnect between a momentary statistical description and the actuality of human experience. The author wants to evoke a frame within which humanistic psychologists can attend to the character of specifically human activity and experience. In the article is explained the systematic nature of

qualitative research in order to find commonalities in lived worlds by studying individual observations and reported states. Applicable to the present research is the focus on empirical phenomenology, which is an individual's descriptions of a specific situation in their perspective. This article provides the present research with a framework through which it acknowledges the individuality of human participants and the human researcher; namely that knowledge of an event is developed through perspective and ever-evolving interpretations.

Freakley, B., Czech, D. R., Harris, B., Burdette, G. T. (2013). *Old school, new school or both: a qualitative analysis of NCAA Division I men's soccer coaches' perception on leadership* (Unpublished master's thesis). Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, GA.

The author of this qualitative research project attempted to describe any potential differences in leadership style in light of experience level. The participants were all Division I men's soccer coaches A rich discourse of leadership frameworks was given that touched on all of trait, behavioral, situational, and interactional approaches. Several themes arose from the phenomenological descriptions given by the coaches: passion, integrity (role modeling), knowledge of the game/ job, organization/ responsibility, clear communication, situational task orientation, situational orientation, and emphasis on the ability to develop and maintain good interpersonal relationships. This research provides a view into how many roles a sport leader fulfills and how leadership style can be both unique to an individual yet constrained to proven methods. In addition, the interview questions used by the author were based from the Revised Leadership Scale for Sport (R-LSS) and will provide a general interview protocol for the present research.

Sagie, A. (1996). Effects of Leader's Communication Style and Participative Goal Setting on Performance and Attitudes. *Human Performances, 9*(1), 51-64.

This study researches two aspects of leadership activities with respect to performance in sub-ordinates, goal-setting behaviors and communication styles; therefore, it must take into account a couple of different theories. The researcher looks into three kinds of goal-setting methods: participative, assigned, or "do-your-best." Behind these behaviors is the thought that more challenging goals lead to higher levels of performance and that one of that major tenants of leadership is developing goals for the group. This research believes that there will be a positive relationship between PGS and attitude regardless of goal level; essentially, no matter how difficult a goal may seem, employees will show more positive attitudes should they participate in setting that goal. The second part of this research was geared toward the communication style of a leader and its effect on team performance. The three levels of leadership communication are high directiveness, a leader that is consistently involved with the team, low directiveness, a leader with a more laissez-faire approach, and the absence of a leader. This study attempted to show that communication style, and not goal-setting method, will have a higher effect on team performance. The important findings show that teams with a high directive leader achieved highest performance levels, teams with participative goal-setting showed most positive attitudes, and that team with a combination of high directive leadership and

participative goal-setting yielded the best results. As my own study will approach the effectiveness of autocratic versus democratic decision making behaviors of leaders, this research gives insight into how incorporating team members into goal-setting will improve their attitudes as well as showing that when it comes to producing results, a structured and challenging leader can increase performance levels. That alone contributes greatly to the direction my research in effective leadership behaviors, but this research also opens the door into several leadership theories which can refine my own questions in the long run.

Satterfield, J. M. (2000). Optimism, culture, and history: the roles of explanatory style, integrative complexity, and pessimistic rumination. In J. E. Gillham (Ed. 1), *The science of optimism and hope* (pp. 349-378). Philadelphia, PA: Templeton Foundation Press.

 In this chapter the author offers discussion of a wide range of topics. Most applicable to the present research is the author's dissection of the explanatory styles of optimism and pessimism. The author states that explanatory styles has been shown to: predict behavior in adverse situations, influence decision-making, and influence a wide range of actions. He also shows that pessimists over time will develop beliefs of helplessness which leads to decreased goal-oriented behavior. In addition, he discusses correlations found between high optimists and higher motivation to act due to increased feelings of controllability. High optimists have also been shown to exhibit more effective coping strategies than pessimists with high optimists suffering decreased emotional consequences in light of setbacks, and adopting a highly task-specific focus as opposed to pessimists ruminating on the setback itself. This chapter provides a framework for the present research in that it covers differing methods of decision-making and problem-solving between optimists and pessimists. The chapter can also connect to several studies done regarding motivation of athletes.

Shatté, A. J., Gillham, J. E., & Reivich, K. (2000). Promotion hope in children and adolescents. In J. E. Gillham (Ed. 1), *The science of optimism and hope* (pp. 215-234). Philadelphia, PA: Templeton Foundation Press.

The authors of this chapter provide a review of the Penn Optimism Program (POP). This program is a depression prevention initiative that concentrates on two aspects of depression/ hope: cognitive and behavioral. The authors give descriptions of both hope and hopelessness, and how both are a product of having either an optimistic or pessimistic mindset. The POP uses Ellis's ABC model as part of the intervention to explain to children and adolescents the power of individual Beliefs over the Consequences following the Activating event. The POP also focuses on explanatory styles and how optimism and pessimism influences a person's outlook on controllability. Highlighted in this chapter are the long term results of having optimism or pessimism as an explanatory style, a topic that applies to the present research and how any differences may influence views of leadership. This statement is especially true in light of how optimists and pessimists interpret adversity and feedback, both common occurrences in sport.

Shearman, E., Czech, D. R., Burdette, T., McDaniel, T., Joyner, B., Zwald, D. (2011). A comparison of optimism levels and life stress levels among NCAA Division I athletes and non- athletes. *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics, 4,* 190-206.

This research examined levels in optimism and life stress among collegiate athletes and non-athletes in addition to gender. The authors review the operationalization of dispositional optimism as an explanatory style and use cognitive adaptation theory to suggest that optimistic individuals are more apt in coping with stressful situations. The study found that high-level optimistic athletes experience significantly lower levels of stress than low-level optimistic athletes; that high-level optimistic athletes experience significantly lower levels of stress than high-level optimistic athletes; and that high-level optimistic men experience significantly lower levels of stress than high-level optimistic women. Applicable to the present research is the use of the Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R) and its success among collegiate athletes in a southeastern university. In addition, the authors split the data across the LOT-R into thirds: low, middle, high; and they compared the low- and high- scores in data analysis. This method will also be used in the present research.

Zaccaro, S. J. (2007). Trait-based perspectives of leadership. *American Psychologist*, *62*, 6-16.

This study examines the trait-based perspective of leadership. The author states that the trait based leadership approach is arguably the oldest approach to leadership, yet has never been able to offer clear distinctions between leaders and non-leaders. Furthermore, the trait approach has received criticism for its failure to account for situational variance in leadership behavior. The author posits that a "combination of traits and attributes, integrated in conceptually meaningful ways, are more likely to predict leadership than additive or independent contributions of several single traits." Furthermore, the author argues that a defining core of dominant leader traits reflects ability to lead in various ways. Finally, the author presents a multistage model that suggests some leader traits have more influence on the leadership processes and performance, while others have more effects that are influenced by situational parameters. This research adds a layer describing preferred leadership styles and will give some guidance in any conclusions my own research may reach.

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