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THE PERSON BEHIND THE TEAM: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION  
OF THE ROLE OF THE SPORT SUPERVISOR IN NCAA DIVISION I  
INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS

By

Ehren R. Green

B.S., Ball State University, 2003  
M.S., West Virginia University, 2004  
M.A., West Virginia University, 2006

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Faculty of the  
College of Education and Human Development of the University of Louisville  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in  
Educational Leadership and Organizational Development

Department of Health and Sport Sciences  
University of Louisville  
Louisville, Kentucky

August 2022

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A Dissertation Approved on

August 10, 2022

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my boys,

my husband, Bryan – I love you

and

my two sons, Henry and Nathan – you can do hard things

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is a labor of love, time, and perseverance. In some form or fashion it has been “in the works” for over 12 years. Earning my PhD has been on my bucket list for a long time, and I never knew if it would actually happen – but it has! To that point, I first want to acknowledge myself. Ehren, you did it! While there were times you were scared, uncertain, and thought you were not smart enough, you have shown yourself that you are smart enough and that you CAN do hard things. Be proud of this accomplishment.

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## ABSTRACT

### THE ROLE OF THE SPORT SUPERVISOR

Ehren R. Green

August 10, 2022

As organizational connectors, athletic administrators who serve as sport supervisors, are integral to the success of intercollegiate athletic departments. However, little is known about the role of sport supervisor or the relationship between sport supervisors and head coaches. Thus, this study seeks to define and better understand the role of the sport supervisor in intercollegiate athletics and explore the relationship between the sport supervisor and the head coach. Through a descriptive phenomenological approach, 22 participants (11 sport supervisors and 11 head coaches) from NCAA Division I institutions were interviewed. Role theory guided the defining of the role while leader-member exchange theory directed the exploration of the relationship of the sport supervisor and the head coach. The findings show the role of the sport supervisor is to be a partner with the head coach by providing support, advocacy, and evaluation of the programs they supervise. Furthermore, the study highlighted the importance of trust in developing a high-quality relationship between a sport supervisor and a head coach. Additionally, sport supervisors need to show care and investment in the program as well as be intentionally present to help build trust with their head coaches.

While head coaches can help build trust with their sport supervisor by being transparent. The findings from this study illuminate critical findings for individual programs within intercollegiate athletic departments as well as the department as a whole.

This dissertation is outlined as follows. Chapter one provides an introduction of the topic and a statement of the program. Following, chapter two provides an in-depth discussion on middle managers, role theory, and leader-member exchange. Then, chapter three provides an overview of the methodological approach utilized for this study. Following chapter three, is the first of two research papers that complete this dissertation. Research paper one defines the role of the sport supervisor while research paper two explores the relationship between the sport supervisor and the head coach.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

As head coaches of elite programs, Dabo Sweeney and Nick Saban are synonymous with National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I football. However, behind every head coach is an athletic administrator providing day-to-day support and guidance to the head coach and program. Typically, these athletic administrators hold titles such as assistant, associate, or deputy athletic director and comprise 45% of all non-coaching staff positions in NCAA intercollegiate athletic departments (Ott & Beaumont, 2020). Making up almost half of intercollegiate athletic departments, supporting administrators (i.e., assistant, associate, and deputy athletic directors) are key organizational connectors (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1997), linking the administrative unit to individual departments and teams. Research has shown administrative positions that link one part of the organization to another are vital to an organization's success (Currie & Proctor, 2005; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997). As such, supporting athletic administrators is crucial to the organizational success of athletic departments. Additionally, many of these athletic administrators embody dual, and sometimes competing roles as both an administrative lead for a specific unit (e.g., marketing, ticketing and sales, or development) and an administrative lead for a specific

team (e.g., men's basketball). When an administrator serves as a lead for a team, this role is identified as a sport supervisor.

The role of sport supervisor is a designation given to athletic administrators by athletic directors; it implies a level of administrative leadership and oversight to the assigned team or teams. In the role of sport supervisor, these administrators are mid-level athletic administrators connecting the administrative unit of the department with the individual team(s) they are assigned to lead (Ott & Beaumont, 2020). Interestingly, the designation of sport supervisor is commonly an added role and is rarely identified in the administrator's formal title. For example, a common title in intercollegiate athletics is associate athletic director for marketing, which identifies this individual as a leader for the marketing unit. However, it is also common for a person with this title to also be assigned as a sport supervisor for a specific team or teams; a designation that is not easily identifiable, but nonetheless important to team and organizational success. Thus, sport supervisors often have dual roles supporting both administrative units and supporting individual teams. Performing both roles can lead to poor boundaries within the work environment, role conflict, and increased workload as sport supervisors attempt to balance the separate, yet sometimes competing roles (Blake, 2020). For example, a sport supervisor could experience competing expectations between the needs of a head coach versus the departmental needs of the athletic department. Despite the potential challenges of the role, an exploration of the role of the sport supervisor and the sport supervisor/coach relationship is integral to the success of the coach, team, and ultimately, the department (Gerstner & Day, 1997). Moreover, mid-level athletic administrators, and

specifically sport supervisors, have been absent from intercollegiate athletic research (Hardin et al., 2013; Ott & Beaumont, 2020).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Current research on intercollegiate athletic departments has focused on populations within intercollegiate athletic departments including, athletic directors (Grappendorf & Lough, 2006; Taylor & Hardin, 2016; Welty Peachey & Burton, 2011; Whisenant et al., 2002), coaches (Kim & Andrew, 2015; Turner & Chelladurai, 2005), and students (Watson, 2005; Watt & Moore, 2001). However, there is a dearth of research that focuses specifically on mid-level athletic administrators as a specific population within intercollegiate athletic departments (Hardin et al., 2013; Ott & Beaumont, 2020), despite that fact that middle managers in other industry sectors like business and higher education have been studied extensively and have been found to be integral to an organization's success (Costanzo & Tzoumpa, 2008; Currie & Proctor, 2005; Dutton et al., 1997; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992). Specifically, research has shown that middle managers influence multiple functions of organizations including, organizational strategy (Currie & Proctor, 2005; Van Rensburg, et al., 2014), knowledge integration and transfer (Costanzo & Tzoumpa, 2008), emotional support (Huy, 2002), and idea generation (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1997; Dutton et al., 1997; Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990). Considering sport supervisors typically serve multiple roles in athletic departments, it is critical to understand the role of the sport supervisor in intercollegiate athletics. Furthermore, it is imperative to better understand the relationship between the sport supervisor and the head coach. Developing a better understanding of the role of sport supervisor may, (a) guide current and future sport supervisors to effectively support

head coaches and programs; (b) positively influence the experiences of student-athletes, coaches, and administrators; (c) align expectations between the sport supervisor and the head coach to build a more effective sport supervisor/coach relationship; and (d) guide athletic directors on training, retaining, and hiring of sport supervisors.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

Two theoretical frameworks, role theory and leader-member exchange (LMX), will guide this study. Role theory will explicate the role of the sport supervisor guiding the understanding of behaviors and expectations for the role. Furthermore, role theory will introduce the concept of role episode to explain the social interaction of individuals in the role set. LMX, which derives from role theory, will further guide the understanding of the social interaction, focusing on the dyadic relationship of the sport supervisor and head coach. Specifically, LMX will elucidate the quality of the relationship between the sport supervisor and the head coach.

#### ***Role Theory***

Role theory focuses on the behavioral patterns of individuals within organizational settings (Katz & Kahn, 1978). The constructs of role theory developed in the early studies of division of labor, the theory of self, and rule and rule complying behavior (Biddle & Thomas, 1966). Naylor et al. (1980), recognizing that organizations require stable and predictable behaviors from their members, defined roles as repeated and patterned behavior that, when known, can provide stability to an organization. Thus, role theory provides the framework for understanding why roles are needed, how roles are developed, and how roles exist within relationships in an organization (Naylor et al., 1980). Biddle (1979) identified five underlying propositions that role theory is based:

1. Role theorists assert that “some” behaviors are patterned and are characteristic of persons within contexts (i.e., form *roles*).
2. Roles are often associated with sets of persons who share a common identity (i.e., who constitute *social positions*).
3. Persons are often aware of roles, and to some extent roles are governed by the fact of their awareness (i.e., by *expectations*).
4. Roles persist, in part, because of their consequences (functions) and because they are often imbedded within larger social systems.
5. Persons must be taught roles (i.e., must be *socialized*) and may find either joy or sorrow in the performances thereof (p. 8).

Simply put, role theory guides human interaction by recognizing that each individual displays behaviors and those behaviors are set from an individual’s social position and from the expectations of others. Role theorists posit that roles are critical to understanding human behavior in organizations (Naylor et al., 1980).

Ilgen and Hollenbeck (1992), expanded the thinking of role theory with the introduction of their Job-Role Differentiation (JRD) approach. Recognizing that the terms *job* and *role* were consistently being used interchangeably within the industrial and organizational psychology field, Ilgen and Hollenbeck (1992) saw a need to define boundaries between jobs and roles. They define job as, “a set of task elements grouped together under one job title and designed to be performed by a single individual” (Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1992, p. 173), where the task elements set the boundaries between *job* and *role*. Established task elements are formally described and are set by the primary beneficiary, typically the manager. Thus, established task elements define an individual’s

*job*. Emergent tasks, on the other hand, are additional tasks that are dynamic, subjective, and emerge from multiple beneficiaries (Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1992). Emergent tasks acknowledge organizational environments as vibrant and ever-changing, not static. It is through emergent tasks that *roles* derive. Ilgen and Hollenbeck (1992) define roles as, “larger sets containing emergent task elements plus those elements of the jobs that are communicated to the job incumbent through the social system and maintained in that system” (p.174). Thus, JDR will explicate the role of the sport supervisor in NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics.

Focusing on the social interaction of individuals within organizations, Katz and Kahn (1966) introduced the role-episode construct to explicate the relationship of individuals working together to set expectations for a specific role. Within organizations, individuals with direct relationships with each other form role sets. The role set consists of the focal person, their subordinates, and other members whom they may work with closely. For a sport supervisor, their role set would presumably consist of themselves as the focal person, the athletic director, and head coach of the sport they supervise (See Figure 1. The role-episode then is the interaction amongst those in the role set. Wickman and Parker (2006) define the role-episode as, “any interaction between employees whereby role-expectations and role-behaviors are manifest in measurable consequences” (p.443). Simply stated, the role-episode is the social interaction that occurs between individuals within a role set, where the individual behaviors of the focal person are derived from the expectations of the members of their role set. Thus, a sport supervisor’s behavior manifest from expectations set by both the head coach and the athletic director.

In summary, role theory provides the foundation to understand the role of the sport supervisor through examination of the human behavior of the sport supervisor as well as the social interaction between the sport supervisor and the head coach.

### ***Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) Theory***

Building from role theory, specifically Katz and Kahn's (1966) role-episode process, LMX provides a theoretical framework to understand the relationship, not just the interaction, between the leader or supervisor and the member or follower. LMX focuses on the relationship between two individuals, a supervisor, and a follower. A relationship between two individuals is known as a dyadic relationship. With a focus on the supervisor/follower relationship within organizations, LMX identifies that differentiated relationships exist between supervisors and their followers (Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen, 1976; Graen & Scandura, 1987). LMX posits differentiated relationships will exist based on perceptions of roles, expectations, communication styles, and personalities.

The first leadership theory to acknowledge the relationship between the leader and the follower, LMX was first established by Dansereau et al. (1975) as the vertical dyad linkage (VDL). Dansereau et al. (1975) were the first to discover supervisors create differentiated relationships with their followers, and the relationship built with a follower impacts the follower, as well as the organization's performance. In their seminal work, Dansereau et al. (1975) learned supervisors demonstrated one of two types of authority, either leadership, which is influence without authority, or supervision, which is influence based on authority. Supervisors who influence as leaders develop higher quality relationships with their followers than supervisors who influence through supervision.

Followers who develop high-quality relationships are identified as the “in-group,” while followers with low-quality relationship with their supervisors are identified as the “out-group.” High quality relationships between the supervisor and the follower include high levels of trust, mutual obligation, and respect (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Whereas low-quality relationships are absent of trust, mutual obligation, and respect and hinder the follower’s experience in the organization. The construct of in-group/out-group is a staple of LMX theory recognizing that supervisors develop differentiated relationships with followers and the type of relationship developed impacts the follower as well as the organization.

Further development of LMX moved the theory away from the in-group/out-group concept to an exploration of *how* supervisors can build high-quality relationships with their followers. Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) developed the Leadership Making model to explicate the differences in low-quality and high-quality relationships and these relationships are formed. LMX and specifically the Leadership Making model will guide the understanding of the relationship between the sport supervisor and the head coach to explicate the quality of the relationship and *how* relationships in this dyad are formed.

### **Study Purpose and Research Question**

The purpose of this study is two-fold. First, this study seeks to define and better understand the role of the sport supervisor in intercollegiate athletics. Second, this study explores the relationship between the sport supervisor and the head coach. This two-pronged approach will not only help clarify the role of the sport supervisor but may also provide insight into how relationships between the sport supervisor and head coach may lead to broader organizational implications. The key research questions guiding the study



is, what is the role of the sport supervisor in NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletic departments and what is the relationship between the sport supervisor and the head coach.

This study is guided by four research questions:

1. How do athletic administrators, who hold the role of a sport supervisor, perceive their role as a sport supervisor within the intercollegiate athletic department?
  - 1 (a). How do sport supervisors negotiate their day-to-day tasks as a sport supervisor?
2. How do head coaches perceive the role of the sport supervisor within intercollegiate athletic departments?
3. How do sport supervisors perceive the relationship between themselves and the head coaches they supervise?
4. How do head coaches perceive the relationship between themselves and their assigned sport supervisor?

Answers to these research questions will illustrate how sport supervisors perceive and experience their role as a sport supervisor, provide a foundation for understanding the tangible aspects of the role of sport supervisor, and examine the dyadic sport supervisor/head coach relationship from the perspective of both the leader and the member. The research questions will be answered utilizing a qualitative phenomenological approach to understand the lived experience of athletic administrators who are also sport supervisors.

## **Significance of the Study**

Understanding the functions of the people within the organizational structure is imperative to the effectiveness of the organization (Cameron et al., 2011; Katz & Kahn, 1978). As a people-centered business, human behavior is crucial to sport organizations, thus the study of human behavior in sport organizations is essential (Barr & Hums, 2019). Furthermore, as an integral member of intercollegiate athletic departments, understanding the role of the sport supervisor in NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics is essential to the organizational effectiveness of NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics.

Understanding the role of the sport supervisor within NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletic departments will have both practical and theoretical implications. From a practical standpoint, athletic directors and head coaches will gain first-hand insights on the role of the sport supervisor to better understand role expectations, barriers, opportunities for support, more efficient organizational structures, and enhanced leadership development. Additionally, a more thorough understanding of the role of sport supervisor can positively influence the experience of athletic administrators, coaches, and student-athletes. Moreover, a more thorough understanding of the relationship between the sport supervisor and the head coach will formulate the expectations of the role of sport supervisor guiding the sport supervisor, as a supervisor, to build a more effective relationship with their follower, the head coach. A stronger relationship between the sport supervisor and the head coach will lead to organizational success.

Theoretically, this research will further develop role theory, LMX theory, and the middle management literature. Role theory has mainly been utilized in sociology, psychology, industrial and organizational psychology, and business (Abramis, 1994;

Biddle, 1986; Welbourne et al., 1998). Thus, this study will introduce role theory to a new organizational context, intercollegiate athletics. While the sport management literature has examined LMX theory, the focus has been on the coach/athlete relationship (Case, 1998; Caliskan, 2015; Cranmer, 2016; Cranmer & Myers, 2015). This study will expand the use of LMX theory in sport management with a specific focus on the administrator/coach relationship, a unique dyadic relationship. Furthermore, this study will provide valuable insights for the sport management literature, which has historically ignored mid-level administrators, by clarifying the definition of mid-level administrators in intercollegiate athletics (Hardin et al., 2013; Ott & Beaumont, 2020).

### **Limitations**

Limitations are common in qualitative studies and this study is no different. First, the findings in this study cannot be generalized to all sport supervisors nor to all relationships between sport supervisors and head coaches. Every sport supervisor and head coach's experience is unique to their past and current situations. Furthermore, every institution has its own unique organizational structure and culture which impacts both the role of the sport supervisor and the relationship between the sport supervisor and the head coach. Thus, the findings of this study are limited to the experiences of the sport supervisors and head coaches examined in this study. To address this limitation, triangulation of qualitative data sources was conducted to ensure a breadth of information was gleaned (Patton, 1999). By capturing the perspective of both the sport supervisor and the head coach as it relates to the role of the sport supervisor, differences and similarities are illuminated to provide a more detailed perspective of the role of the sport supervisor. Additionally, the incorporation of job descriptions assists with the triangulation of the

data to compare the stated expectations written in the job descriptions to the actual lived experiences. Triangulation of data also aids in the transferability and trustworthiness of this study. Transferability suggests that when other sport administrators and/or head coaches read this study, they are likely to relate to some, if not many, of the experiences shared in the findings.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations are the research boundaries of the study (Glesne, 2016). This study is set by such boundaries. This study's focus is on understanding the role of the sport supervisor in NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics and the relationship of the sport supervisor and the head coach. While every attempt was made to ensure the sample was diverse in numerous ways (i.e., gender, race, years in role, years in industry, formal title, etc.) it was not possible to capture the experience of every possible unique sport supervisor or head coach.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Follower:** The individual in the dyadic relationship that reports to the individual with authority. Also referred to in the LMX literature as subordinate and member (Dansereau et al., 1975; Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Scandura, 1987; Ilies et al., 2007).

**Job:** "A set of task elements grouped together under one job title and designed to be performed by a single individual" (Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1992, p. 173).

**Mid-level athletic administrator:** "mid-level" positions in intercollegiate athletics programs as all jobs, with the exception of the athletics director, that have: 1. Primary responsibilities for supporting and advancing the athletics department's operational and administrative enterprise; and 2. Supervisory responsibilities over individuals or

programs within the institution's intercollegiate athletics department (Ott & Beaumont, 2020, p.90).

**Roles:** “larger sets containing emergent task elements plus those elements of the jobs that are communicated to the job incumbent through the social system and maintained in that system” (Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1992, p.174).

**Sport supervisor:** Designation given to an athletic administrator by an athletic director; it implies a level of administrative leadership and oversight to the assigned team or teams.

**Supervisor:** The individual in the dyadic relationship that has authority. Also referred to in LMX literature as superior and leader (Dansereau et al., 1975; Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Scandura, 1987; Ilies et al., 2007).

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to define and better understand the role of the sport supervisor and to explore the relationship between the sport supervisor and the head coach in NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics. This study will help clarify the role of the sport supervisor while providing insights into how the relationships between the sport supervisor and head coach can lead to broader organizational implications. Two theoretical frameworks guide this study, role theory and leader-member exchange (LMX). Role theory guides the understanding of the role of the sport supervisor while LMX explicates the relationship between the sport supervisor and the head coach. Additionally, to better understand the role of the sport supervisor, an understanding of middle managers is necessary to explicate their location within the organizational structure and to clearly identify sport supervisors as middle managers.

#### **Middle Managers**

Historically, research on management has failed to clearly define middle managers (Balogun & Johnson, 2004). For example, Uytterhoeven (1989) defined the middle manager as, “a general manager who is responsible for a particular business unit at the intermediate level of the corporate hierarchy” (p.136). Mintzberg (1989) described

middle managers as, “a hierarchy of authority between the operating core and the apex” (p. 98), while Dopson et al. (1996) stated middle managers are, “those below the small group of top strategic managers and above first-level supervision” (p.40). Huy (2002) provided more specificity by defining middle managers as, “people who are two levels below the CEO [chief executive officer] and one level above first-line supervisor” (p.38). In a 25-year review of middle management research, Wooldridge et al. (2008) noted, “the theoretical definition of middle management remains somewhat ambiguous...” (p. 1217). Still, one common and defining factor of middle managers has been their access to top management; however, top management has not always been consistently defined, thus, further complicating our understanding of the middle manager (Castañer & Yu, 2017). A contributing factor to the issue of consistently defining middle managers, is the uniqueness of organizations. Larger organizations have multiple organizational levels while smaller organizations may only have two or three organizational levels. Thus, Castañer and Yu (2017) acknowledge that there can be various levels of middle managers depending on the size and structure of the organization.

Despite the existing confusion in the research on middle managers, Castañer and Yu (2017) recognize supervision over at least one employee as a distinguishable criterion of a manager from a non-manager position. Beyond the supervision criterion, Castañer and Yu (2017) argue that the definition of middle manager is dependent on the organizational perspective of the given issue, as well as the scope and structural complexity of the organization. Simply stated, supervising another employee is only one facet of middle management, other facets of middle management are more unique to the organization and issue. For example, when examining the decision-making process for a

large organization with multiple levels, Castañer and Yu (2017) argue that the term ‘top management’ should be reserved for those individuals who have the power and authority to make the final decisions for the organization. However, it is possible that for a mid-sized or small organization with fewer organizational levels, middle managers may also be final decision-makers. Highlighting the complexity in defining these roles, the ‘top managers’ in the example above, may or may not hold titles in the corporate executive committee level, known as the “C-suite” (e.g., Finkelstein and Hambrick, 1996) depending on the structural complexity of the organization. Therefore, in this example, middle managers could exist at either the level below “C-suite” or two or even three levels below. Thus, because each organization is unique, Castañer and Yu (2017) and Wooldridge et al. (2008) urge researchers to explicitly define middle managers within the context of the specific organization and the middle managers’ position within the organization when studying middle managers. While this suggestion may decrease consistency across studies, by providing a definition in the context, this respects the uniqueness of an organization while providing specificity around a particular role. To accurately define middle managers in intercollegiate athletic departments, an understanding of how middle managers are defined within higher education is necessary.

### **The Mid-Level Administrator in Higher Education**

As institutions of higher education become more complex, research on middle managers within higher education has increased (Adams-Dunford et al., 2019; Mather et al., 2009; Mills, 2000). The increase of students’ needs as well as the diversity of those needs fueled the growth of administrative positions, particularly mid-level manager positions (Ellis & Moon, 1991). This growth also led to the addition of complex



hierarchical structures and titles (Adams-Dunford et al., 2019) further complicating how higher education defines middle managers.

There are some distinct characteristics that help define middle management roles within higher education. First, middle managers in higher education implement priorities identified by senior managers (Mills, 2000). Second, middle managers are the conduit of information between senior leaders and entry level employees (Mather et al., 2009). Finally, middle managers often act as a connector between various levels of the organizations (Mather et al., 2009; Mills, 2000). Considering the specific mission of higher education institutions, Young (2007) broadened the definition of middle managers, recognizing them as a resource for new employees, but most importantly as counsel to senior leaders on the needs of the students recognizing the influence middle managers have on the students' experience and learning. From a structural perspective, mid-level administrators in higher education have been identified as academic or nonacademic support, classified as nonexempt, and titled as administrators, professionals, or specialist (Rosser, 2000). Additionally, mid-level administrative positions are distinguished by their specific skill set, training, experience, and their respective administrative unit (Rosser, 2000).

Despite the various characteristics of middle managers identified by scholars, the literature has not adopted a formalized definition for middle managers in higher education. While athletic departments are embedded within institutions of higher education, they, too, have unique and complex organizational structures. These structures are both isolated from and connected directly to the college or university. In NCAA Division I, athletic departments are often considered corporate business entities that must

work to satisfy the mission of the higher education institution while also endeavoring to generate millions in revenue, produce winning records and star athletes, and provide an entertainment experience for fans and alumni in a community, region, or across the nation (Nite & Bopp, 2017). This complex dynamic can strain athletic department employees, specifically middle managers that may navigate dual roles with oversight of a department and at least one athletic team.

When examining employees in intercollegiate athletic departments, most studies have focused on athletic directors (Grappendorf & Lough, 2006; Hardin et al., 2013; Taylor & Hardin, 2016; Welty Peachey & Burton, 2011; Whisenant et al., 2002) and coaches (Kim & Andrew, 2015; Turner & Chelladurai, 2005). While research in the private and public sector has identified the importance of studying middle managers (Costanzo & Tzoumpa, 2008; Currie & Proctor, 2005; Dutton et al., 1997; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1997; Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990) this specific population has been relatively absent from research in intercollegiate athletics, despite comprising 45% of NCAA intercollegiate athletic department personnel (NCAA, 2021; Ott & Beaumont, 2020). The only known study on mid-level athletic administrators was conducted by Ott and Beaumont (2020). Ott and Beaumont (2020) utilized the functional concepts of middle management provided by previous scholars (e.g., Mills, 2000) to define mid-level administrators in intercollegiate athletics. They defined mid-level athletic administrators as,

“mid-level” positions in intercollegiate athletics programs as all jobs, with the exception of the athletics director, that have: 1. Primary responsibilities for supporting and advancing the athletics department’s operational and

administrative enterprise; and 2. Supervisory responsibilities over individuals or programs within the institution’s intercollegiate athletics department (p.90).

Furthermore, Ott and Beaumont (2020) identified two mid-level tiers distinguished by the level of separation between the mid-level administrator and the athletic director (See Table 1). For example, assistant athletic directors and directors are classified as mid-level tier II, while associate athletic directors, senior associate athletic directors, deputy athletic directors and c-level positions (e.g., chief financial officer, etc.) are classified as mid-level tier I positions (Ott & Beaumont, 2020). Since both mid-level tier I and tier II positions could include the additional role of sport supervisor, for the purpose of this study, positions in both tier I and tier II will be considered mid-level athletic administrators.

**Table 1**

*Staff and Administrator Positions in Intercollegiate Athletics Programs*

Category	Sample Titles
Entry	Academic Advisor, Life Skills Coordinator, Compliance Coordinator, Social Media Specialist, Assistant Athletic Trainer, Assistant Director of Sports Information, Event Coordinator
Mid-Level Tier II	Assistant Director of Athletics, Head Equipment Manager, Business Manager, Manager of Ticket Sales, Director of Compliance, Director of Marketing & Promotions, Sports Information Director, Head Athletic Trainer
Mid-Level Tier I	Associate Director of Athletics, Senior Associate Director of Athletics, Chief Operating Officer, Chief Financial Officer, Senior Woman Administrator
Executive	Director of Athletics

*Note.* Most titles in the table are general and provided as examples. Programs often assign different official titles for the roles listed here. However, NCAA member schools are required to designate a Senior Woman Administrator and a Director of Athletics, for association- and conference-level governance roles. Adapted from “Defining and describing mid-level administrators in intercollegiate athletics,” by M. Ott and J. Beaumont, 2020, *New Directions for Higher Education*, 189, p. 91 (<https://doi.1002/he.20356>).

### **Middle Managers’ Importance in Organizations**

While it is important to understand what organizational titles constitute middle managers, it is equally important to understand the roles and tasks of those in the positions. Ironically, the same level of complexity that plagues defining middle managers is present in understanding their roles and tasks. Middle managers have been described as, “being stuck between levels without agency” (Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020, p.146); “at once controller, controlled, resister and resisted” (Harding et al., 2014, p. 1231); and, as “linking pins who have upward, downward and lateral influence” (Van Rensburg et al., 2014, p. 167). Furthermore, the function of the middle manager is ambiguous, as researchers have examined what middle managers *should* do, what they *actually* do, and the *skills* required to be an effective middle manager (Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020; Harding et al., 2014).

In their seminal work, Wooldridge and Floyd (1990) identify middle managers as strategic actors who play a pivotal role in the organization’s strategic initiatives. They argue middle managers play a substantial role in the strategic decision-making process beyond just implementation (Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990). Top-level managers should

include middle managers in the early phases of decision-making with the expectation that middle managers will question ideas to further develop the strategic initiatives for the organization. Ultimately, this leads to improved decisions for the organization (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997). While implementation of strategic initiatives should not be the only role of middle managers, they are vital to the effective implementation of agreed upon initiatives (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997).

Middle managers are also facilitators of learning and knowledge within an organization (Constanzo & Tzoumpa, 2008). Organizational learning, as defined by Dibella et al. (1996), is an organization's capacity to maintain or improve performance through experience. Organizational learning includes the processes of knowledge acquisition and knowledge sharing (Constanzo & Tzoumpa, 2008). More specifically, knowledge acquisition is a creation process for new ideas, relationships, and thoughts, while knowledge sharing is the assimilation process of integrating the learning into new situations (Constanzo & Tzoumpa, 2008). The new learning that is both acquired and shared can thus positively impact an organization's behaviors and performance (Constanzo & Tzoumpa, 2008). As linking pins between vertical levels within an organization, middle managers, who have acquired knowledge, can facilitate the knowledge sharing process to increase the organization's overall performance (Constanzo & Tzoumpa, 2008).

While vital to the organization, middle managers can also find themselves in challenging positions within the organizational structure or levels of organizations. When "being stuck between levels" (Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020, p.146), it is common for middle managers to experience contradictory expectations (Currie & Proctor, 2005). To

employees in the organization, the middle manager is the supervisor or leader; to others, they are a subordinate or follower. Thus, it is not uncommon for middle managers to experience role conflict and role ambiguity as they balance the often-contradictory expectations of the employees above and below them (Currie & Proctor, 2005). For mid-level athletic administrators who are sport supervisors, they must balance expectations from the athletic director as well as those from the head coach of the respective programs they oversee. Or, said another way, they must balance the needs of the overall department with those of the individual program. Either way, this middle management position can pose challenges as sport supervisors balance various needs.

As integral members to the organization's performance (Costanzo & Tzoumpa, 2008; Currie & Proctor, 2005; Dutton et al., 1997; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992), middle managers are also fraught with confusion and ambiguity often driven by a lack of clear expectations and understanding of their role (Currie & Proctor, 2005; Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020). Central to the understanding of social structures and human behavior in organizations, roles provide guidance for conceptualizing behaviors (Mead, 1934; Turner, 1978; Welbourne et al., 1998). Role theory, which focuses on patterned behaviors and shared expectations (Biddle, 1986), provides the framework to understand the role of the sport supervisor.

### **Role Theory**

Within social systems, roles are central to understanding the organization (Welbourne et al., 1998) and employee behavior within the organization (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Roles are repeated and patterned behavior that can provide stability for organizations (Naylor et al., 1980). Role theory provides the framework for

understanding why roles are needed, how roles are developed, and how roles exist within the relationships in an organization (Naylor et al., 1980).

Role theory has a complex history with connections to multiple fields of study including, sociology, psychology, industrial and organizational psychology, and business (Biddle, 1986; Welbourne et al., 1998). Components of role theory emerged in early studies about division of labor, the theory of self, and rules and rule complying behavior (Biddle & Thomas, 1966). George Herbert Mead was one of the first researchers to use the term role when he used “role-taking” to explicate interaction challenges within social contexts (Biddle & Thomas, 1966). In examining role structure, Oeser and Harary (1962) outlined a structural model for role systems with a focus on persons, positions, and tasks. Their formal mathematical model elucidates the relationships that exist within an organization and identifies roles as positions within a social context. Biddle (1986) explained role theory through a theatrical metaphor examining the performances of the individual performers separately and together. From this idea, three main ideals of role theory were established:

- (a) “patterned and characteristic social behaviors,
- (b) parts or identities that are assumed by social participants (others), and
- (c) scripts or expectations for behavior that are understood by all and adhered to by performers” (Biddle, 1986, p.68).

Still, researchers struggled to define and utilize a foundational definition for role (Biddle & Thomas, 1966; Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1992). Katz and Kahn (1966) defined role behavior as, “the recurring actions of an individual, appropriately interrelated with the repetitive activities of others so as to yield a predictable outcome” (p.174). Naylor et al.

(1980) however, recognized that the application of role was not simple, especially in terms of identifying the relevant behaviors of the individuals. He argued that any definition of role must include a means for deciphering role relevant and role irrelevant behavior. Taking into consideration the expectations of the self and others, Naylor et al. (1980) defined behaviors as the act of doing something, and thus, role behavior as the product of those particular acts, or behaviors (Naylor et al., 1980). Their focus was on creating a unit of measured behavior by considering the actual outcome, or product, produced by the behavior and the expectation of that outcome to others or their self (Naylor et al., 1980). In other words, their research focused on understanding how roles, through behaviors, become predictable and consistent within the social system.

While Naylor et al. (1980) focused on the behavioral aspect of the role definition, Biddle (1986) brought attention to expectations of defining roles. In his review of literature on roles, Biddle (1986), identified five perspectives of role theory: functional, symbolic interactionist, structural, organizational, and cognitive, each with a differing definition of role based largely on the application of the term expectations. Biddle (1986) recognized that expectations were either identified as norms, beliefs, or preferences. For example, through the functional role perspective, “roles are conceived as the shared, normative expectations that prescribe and explain (these) behaviors” (p.70), whereas from the symbolic interactionist perspective, roles focus on the individual actor and the interpretation of the actor’s behavior by themselves and others (Biddle, 1986). The cognitive perspective focuses on the relationship between the expectations, including perceived expectations, and behavior (Biddle, 1986). A major difference is the absence of expectations in the symbolic interactionist perspective. Both the organizational and



structural perspective focus on the social structure in which the roles exist, but the structural perspective focuses more on the social positions of individuals rather than expectations (Biddle, 1986). The organizational perspective; however, includes the positions of roles within pre-planned and stable structural systems.

Similar to the history of role theory, defining roles has remained a difficult and challenging task for role theorists (Gross et al., 1958). This difficulty is attributed to the notion of attempting to explain human behavior, a dynamic and complex undertaking. Nevertheless, roles are a vital component of the social structure within organizations (Welbourne et al., 1998). To explicate the role of sport supervisor, this study will take a two-prong approach. Ilgen and Hollenbeck's (1992) JRD approach will be utilized to differentiate the job of the athletic administrator from the role of the sport supervisor. The process of the role of sport supervisor will be elucidated through Katz and Kahn's (1966) role episode approach.

### **Job-Role Differentiation**

While the terms roles and jobs are often used interchangeably, research shows the terms share both similarities and differences (Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1992). The terms jobs and roles are commonly used in organizational settings to define or explain organizational membership. However, Ilgen and Hollenbeck (1992) illustrate through their JRD approach, the two constructs are, in fact, different. This distinction between the two constructs is vital to understanding the sport supervisor role within the athletic administrator's job.

## ***Jobs***

Upon examination of an organization's organizational chart, it is easy to identify the various and numerous jobs that constitute the social system of an organization. Used in everyday jargon, the term *job*, has come to have multiple meanings. Thus, it is necessary to turn to the literature for a foundational understanding of the term *job*.

Through their job-role differentiation (JRD) approach, Ilgen and Hollenbeck (1992) define job as, "a set of task elements grouped together under one job title and designed to be performed by a single individual" (p. 173). Their definition of jobs introduces the important construct of established task elements, the smaller tasks that encompass a job (Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1992). Established task elements are the constructs set by the primary beneficiary, typically the manager. Additionally, established task elements are objective, meaning they are formally described, and the description is documented formally within the organization (Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1992). Thus, established tasks are the duties that are provided in a job description and are derived from a need within the organization. Additionally, established tasks are independent of the job holder. Ilgen and Hollenbeck (1992) also defined jobs as quasi static; noting that jobs, for the most part, do not change daily. Therefore, the established task elements for an athletic administrator include, leading, monitoring, marketing, and student support, as examples (Hancock et al., 2019). Additionally, for an athletic administrator, these established task elements include components that are specific to their area of expertise. For example, interpreting the *NCAA Rules Manual* would be an established task element for an associate athletic director for compliance, whose main responsibility is to provide counsel to coaches and other administrators on NCAA legislation.

Ilgen and Hollenbeck (1992) recognize that while jobs are made up of established task elements, the environment in which these elements exist is not static, but is dynamic, subjective, and personal. Furthermore, the environment in which jobs exist include multiple constituencies, not just the primary beneficiary (Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1992). These observations led to the identification of another set of task elements defined as emergent task elements (Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1992). Emergent task elements are an additional layer to one's job. They are the dynamic, subjective tasks that emerge from multiple sources, including the incumbent (Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1992). For example, emergent tasks for an athletic administrator could include any tasks that lie outside of their formal job description. For some, this can include sport supervision which is not always identified in an administrator's formal job description. It could also include tasks such as special projects assigned to them or department wide projects that are not specific to their unit or team. Ilgen and Hollenbeck (1992) argue that roles are derived from emergent tasks. Thus, emergent task elements are the differentiating factor between jobs and roles.

### ***Roles***

While the individual jobs are clearly identified in an organizational chart, embedded deeper and absent from the visual representation of the organization are the experiences of the employee. Defined as "larger sets containing emergent task elements plus those elements of the jobs that are communicated to the job incumbent through the social system and maintained in that system," (Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1992, p.174) roles are multi-faceted. Simply stated, roles more accurately explicate the experience of an employee accounting for the full experience of the employee, not only what is defined on

paper by the job description. Furthermore, as an additional layer to any employee's job, roles can impact job performance (Welbourne et al., 1998) as well as the relationship between a leader and an employee (Sias & Duncan, 2019). The lack of boundaries, subjective nature, and the multiple social sources that direct the task of sport supervision in NCAA intercollegiate athletics confirm sport supervision as a role for an athletic administrator. Thus, a clear understanding of the athletic administrator's role as a sport supervisor is imperative to organizational effectiveness and to understanding the role of the sport supervisor.

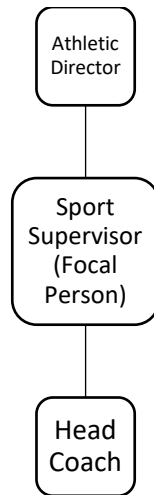
In addition to understanding the role of the sport supervisor, it is also necessary to understand the expectations and the social sources that influence the role of the sport supervisor. The role process, specifically the role episode, will provide the means to dissect the social interactions of the sport supervisor and others in the athletic department.

### **Role-episode**

In organizations, individual members have direct relationships with others who are part of their work-flow process and organizational reporting structure. This small group of individual members constitutes their role set. The role set includes the immediate supervisor of the focal person, their subordinates, and other members of their working environment whom they work with closely (Katz & Kahn, 1966). For example, the role set for a sport supervisor would include the sport supervisor, as the focal person, and the head coach and athletic director (See Figure 1).

### **Figure 1**

*Role Set for Sport Supervisor*

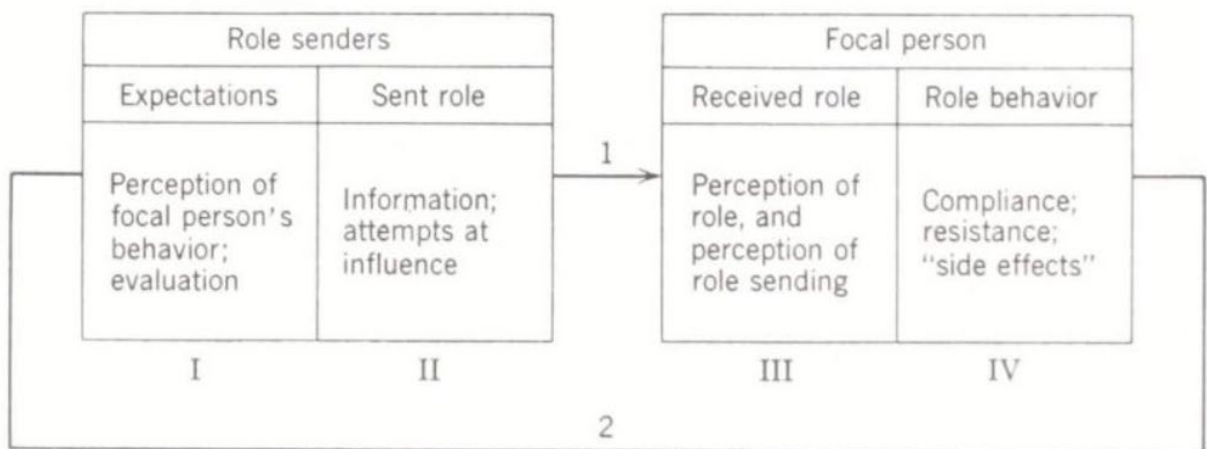


With an understanding of roles as the building block of social systems, Katz and Kahn (1966) introduced the concept of role episode to demonstrate the interaction between individuals in the role set. The role process begins with an understanding that organizations are social systems of human behavior. In the most basic sense, this interaction between one or more individuals can be described as a role-episode (See Figure 2). Formally, a role-episode is defined as, “any interaction between employees whereby role-expectations and role-behaviors are manifest in measurable consequences” (Wickman & Parker, 2006, p.443). Specifically, a role episode includes the behaviors of one individual, also known as the focal person, based on the expectations set by others they interact with. In a role-episode, there exists the focal person, or the person performing in the role (Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1992; Katz & Kahn, 1966), and the role sender, another person who has established role expectations for the focal person (Katz & Kahn, 1966) (See Figure 2). Katz and Kahn (1966) highlight that “role expectations are by no means restricted to the job description as it might be given by the head of the organization or prepared by some specialist in personnel” (p.175). Thus, role expectations are not just set by established tasks (i.e., reviewing the NCAA manual), but also through

interactions with emergent tasks (i.e., dealing with an unexpected student-athlete issue). In a role-episode, the role sender communicates expected behavior to the focal person and the focal person then receives the role (Katz & Kahn, 1966). For example, when examining the relationship of the sport supervisor and the head coach, the head coach serves as the role sender communicating expected behaviors to the sport supervisor, the focal person. The sport supervisor then acts on the information they receive from the head coach. As the focal person, the sport supervisor's reception of the role is based on their individual perception of the sent role (Katz & Kahn, 1966). This perception can include sent role messages from others within the role set and oneself. For example, the sport supervisor is accounting for the expected behaviors established by both the athletic director and the coach. Simultaneously, the sport supervisor is receiving those perceived roles and responding to the information from both senders (Katz & Kahn, 1966). The role-episode concludes with the focal person responding to the sent role.

**Figure 2**

*Role-episode Process*



*Note.* This figure illustrates the process of a role-episode. From *The social psychology of organizations*, by D. Katz and R.L. Kahn, 1966, Wiley.

## **Role Stress**

Role stress can occur when a process in the role episode is disrupted or misinterpreted. Researchers have identified two major forms of role stress - role conflict and role ambiguity. Role conflict and role ambiguity are associated with job stress (House & Rizzo, 1972; Ivancevich & Donnelly, 1974; Orgambidez & Benítez, 2021; Richards, et al., 2017; Rizzo, et al., 1970), lower levels of job satisfaction (Abramis, 1994; Eys et al., 2003; House & Rizzo, 1972; Johnson & Stinson, 1975; Thakre & Shroff, 2016), propensity to leave the organization (House & Rizzo, 1972; Ivancevich & Donnelly, 1974; Johnson & Stinson, 1975; Rizzo, et al., 1970), job performance (Tubre & Collins, 2000), and organizational effectiveness (House & Rizzo, 1972; Ivancevich & Donnelly, 1974; Kahn et al., 1964; Orgambidez & Benítez, 2021). While the terms ‘role conflict’ and ‘role ambiguity’ are, in fact, different role stressors, it is not uncommon for researchers to use both terms interchangeably (Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1992). However, Rizzo et al. (1970) confirmed role conflict and role ambiguity to be separate constructs in their development of a measure for role conflict and role ambiguity; thus, they will be discussed as separate constructs in this study.

## ***Role Conflict***

When the expected behaviors of the focal person are inconsistent with the expectations of the role sender(s), role conflict emerges (Rizzo et al., 1970). Simply put, role conflict is about compatibility-incompatibility (House & Rizzo, 1972). However, just as organizations are complex environments, so too are the interactions of the people that

belong to the organization. Thus, House and Rizzo (1972) provide a broader definition of role conflict noting that the compatibility-incompatibility can occur between:

- (a) the focal person's standards or values and the defined role behavior,
- (b) the time, resources, or capabilities of the focal person and the defined role behaviors,
- (c) the several role responsibilities the focal person fills, or
- (d) various organizational inputs from policies, rules, or cues from related people (p.479).

Role conflict for a sport supervisor may occur when their behavior does not meet the expectation of either the coach or the athletic director. For example, a coach may request additional funding for recruiting from the sport supervisor, while at the same time, the athletic director is sternly directing the sport supervisor to cut spending. Considering the influence both role senders have, it is possible that the sport supervisor experiences role conflict as they try to manage expectations for two different role senders. In addition to maintaining expectations for two role senders, the sport supervisor also must manage their time, energy, and resources between their job and their role. Such incidents of role conflict have been shown to be a source of various types of occupational stress, including, decreased individual satisfaction and organizational effectiveness (Rizzo et al., 1970). A better understanding of the sport supervisor role will provide valuable insights into the role conflict, both in terms of multiple role senders, and through the lens of job-role differentiation, that a sport supervisor may experience.

**Role conflict in sport.** Within the context of sport, role conflict has been examined through the lens of inter-role conflict (Hambrick, et al., 2013; Simmons et al.,



2016). Hambrick et al. (2013) found that female Ironman participants experienced inter-role conflict as they looked to balance the demands of multiple roles, including that as an athlete, family member, and employee. Contrastingly, Simmons et al. (2016) concluded that while male Ironman participants experienced some role conflict, the demands on their role as a family member were less prevalent than those found for female Ironman participants in Hambrick et al. (2013).

### ***Role Ambiguity***

Another form of role stress experienced by individuals is role ambiguity. Role ambiguity is a lack of clear understanding about the actions required to perform one's role (Kahn et al., 1964). Role ambiguity has been further defined by two types of ambiguity, task ambiguity and socioemotional ambiguity (Kahn et al., 1964). Where task ambiguity "results from lack of information concerning the proper definition of the job, its goals, and the permissible means for implementing them" (Kahn et al., 1964, p. 97), socioemotional ambiguity "manifests itself in a person's concern about his standing in the eyes of others about the consequences of his actions for the attainment of his personal goals" (Kahn et al., 1964, p.94). This two-dimensional approach to role ambiguity accounts for the task element of the role process, especially the job-role differentiation, while keeping consideration for the perception of expected behaviors. When a focal person does not understand their role, negative outcomes at both the individual employee level and the organizational level manifest. Given the structure of intercollegiate athletic departments, sport supervisors could commonly find themselves without a proper definition of this role, an understanding of what constitutes success in their role, and

without guidance on how to execute this role. The result could lead to negative outcomes for the sport supervisor, their assigned team(s), and the department.

The relationship between role ambiguity and various work-related outcomes is debated in numerous empirical studies. Ivancevich and Donnelly, (1974) confirmed the importance role clarity has on employee outcomes such as, satisfaction, stress, innovation, and their propensity to leave an organization. Thus, role ambiguity has consistently had a negative effect on job performance (House & Rizzo, 1972; Abramis, 1994). However, the relationship between role ambiguity and job performance has been more conflicted. In his meta-analysis investigating the relationships between role ambiguity, job satisfaction, and job performance, Abramis (1994) found the relationship between role ambiguity and job performance to be negligible. Nevertheless, role ambiguity and job performance has continued to be examined, and studies that are more recent have confirmed role ambiguity to have a negative impact on job performance (Tubre & Collins, 2000; Welbourne et al., 1998), especially in higher level (e.g., professional, managerial) jobs. The job performance discrepancy could be explicated by the different role clarity needs of employees based on their job level within an organization (Ivancevich & Donnelly, 1974). Nevertheless, it appears beneficial for leaders to provide clear role expectations to eliminate role ambiguity (Tubre & Collins, 2000).

In addition to outcomes, numerous moderators have been examined as factors impacting an individual's role ambiguity. As with most human behavior research, individual differences have been identified as moderators. For instance, an employee's need for achievement has been shown to influence their need for role clarity (Johnson &

Stinson, 1975). Specifically, individuals with a high need for achievement have a propensity for role clarity and can find task completion challenging in an ambiguous environment (Johnson & Stinson, 1975). Individuals who have a high need for independence, however, can find conflicting role priorities to be limiting to their self judgement and may see more ambiguous role demands as an opportunity to assert their individual ideas to the role (Johnson & Stinson, 1975). Personality characteristics have also been identified as individual differences that impact the relationship between role ambiguity and various outcomes, including job satisfaction and job stress (Kahn et al., 1964; Katz & Kahn, 1966). In addition to individual moderators, organizational factors have also been identified as moderators to role ambiguity. The culture of an organization (aggressive-defensive; passive-defensive; or constructive) affects the level of stress of individual employees and the level of stress is mediated by role conflict and role ambiguity (van der Velde & Class, 1995). Ultimately, if individuals are experiencing role ambiguity and are uncertain of their role within the organization, there is a likelihood that the uncertainty they are experiencing will have a negative impact on the organization.

**Role ambiguity in sport.** The study of role ambiguity in the sports context has derived from multiple arenas in sport including, sport management and sport psychology. One of the major developments from the sport context has been the analysis of roles from a multi-dimensional perspective. Building on Kahn et al.'s (1964) framework, recent research in the sport context has argued that role ambiguity is multi-dimensional and needs to be examined through such a lens (Eys & Carron, 2001; Sakires et al., 2009; Schulz & Auld, 2006). Eys and Carron (2001) identified four dimensions to role ambiguity, (a) scope of role responsibilities, (b) behaviors to carry out role

responsibilities (c) how role performance will be evaluated, and (d) the consequences of a failure to discharge role responsibilities whereas Sakires et al. (2009) used a three-dimensional approach including, scope of responsibility, means-ends knowledge, and performance outcomes. Scope of responsibility, which some argue *is* role ambiguity, has consistently correlated with role ambiguity. Eys and Carron (2001) examined the relationship between role ambiguity, task cohesion, and task self-efficacy experienced by athletes on a team. They found athletes whose scope of responsibility was unclear to have lower perceptions of team task cohesion (Eys & Carron, 2001). Additionally, scope of responsibility was found to be the best predictor of job satisfaction in Sakires et al.'s (2009) examination of role ambiguity in volunteer sport organizations.

### **Summary**

Roles are critical to understanding human behavior in organizations (Naylor et al., 1980). Unclear role expectations and perceptions can lead to ambiguity, conflict, and stress for people in an organization. Moreover, these stressors can lead to higher levels of job stress (House & Rizzo, 1972; Ivancevich & Donnelly, 1974; Orgambidez & Benítez, 2021; Richards et al., 2017; Rizzo, et al., 1970), lower levels of job satisfaction (Abramis, 1994; Eys et al., 2003; House & Rizzo, 1972; Johnson & Stinson, 1975; Thakre & Shroff, 2016), propensity to leave the organization (House & Rizzo, 1972; Ivancevich & Donnelly, 1974; Johnson & Stinson, 1975; Rizzo, et al., 1970), job performance (Tubre & Collins, 2000), and organizational effectiveness (House & Rizzo, 1972; Ivancevich & Donnelly, 1974; Kahn et al., 1964; Orgambidez & Benítez, 2021). Role theory provides a thorough and multi-faceted approach to understand the role of the sport supervisor which is currently not defined or understood. Furthermore, it is

important to understand the role stressors that sport supervisors may or may not experience as role ambiguity and role conflict have both been contributed negatively to organizational effectiveness (Orgambídez & Benítez, 2021; Rizzo et al., 1970). While role theory helps us to understand behaviors, it does not explicate how the role itself may impact relationships. Thus, leader-member exchange (LMX) builds from role theory to provide a theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between employees (Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen, 1976; Graen & Scandura, 1987).

### **Leader-Member Exchange Theory**

Leader-member exchange (LMX) theory is derived from role theory and expands Kahn's role-episode model with a focus on the dyadic relationships in organizational settings (Kahn et al., 1964). A dyadic relationship is a relationship between two individuals. In the context of LMX, one individual is a leader while the other is the follower. First identified by scholars as the vertical dyad linkage (VDL), LMX focuses on the dyadic relationship between a supervisor and a follower in an organizational setting (Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen, 1976; Graen & Scandura, 1987). LMX recognizes that differentiated relationships exist between supervisors and followers (Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen, 1976; Graen & Scandura, 1987). In other words, leaders develop different relationships with their followers, based on perceptions of roles, expectations, communication styles, and personalities. Thus, where other leadership models take a leader-centric or follower-centric perspective, LMX illustrates the process that links the leader and the follower with a focus on the social exchange between the two parties (Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Sparrowe & Liden, 1997). As a leadership theory, LMX takes a relationship-centric perspective.

LMX literature utilizes the terms supervisor, superior, and leader when discussing the individual with authority (e.g., Dansereau et al., 1975; Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Scandura, 1987; Ilies et al., 2007). Similarly, the terms follower, subordinate, and member are used indiscriminately for the individual in the dyadic relationship that reports to the individual with authority (e.g., Dansereau et al., 1975; Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Scandura, 1987; Ilies et al., 2007). However, the type of authority for the sport supervisor is not yet known. Therefore, to provide consistency and to acknowledge that there is still much to learn about the authority possessed by sport supervisors, the terms supervisor and follower are used to define the members within the sport supervisor/head coach dyadic relationship.

The recognition of the dyadic relationship in organizational settings was first established by Dansereau et al. (1975) and focused specifically on the vertical dyad between a supervisor and a follower. Where, the vertical dyad illustrates the difference in organizational level between the supervisor and the follower. Acknowledging organizational settings exist within social contexts, the identification of the vertical dyad provided a better understanding of leadership in organizational settings (Dansereau et al., 1975, Sparrowe & Liden, 1997). Furthermore, LMX recognizes the differentiated relationships the leader forms with each of their followers. Thus, dyadic and differentiated relationships are the two main tenets of LMX. To better understand the tenet of differentiation further, an examination of the concept of supervision and leadership and an understanding of the different tasks associated with job tasks must be addressed.

In examination of the dyadic relationship, Dansereau et al. (1975) differentiated leadership and supervision based on the type of authority utilized by the supervisor. Leadership is defined as influence without authority. Contrastingly, supervision is defined as influence based on authority, or positional authority (Dansereau et al., 1975). Furthermore, leadership is anchored in the interpersonal exchange between the supervisor and the follower (Dansereau et al., 1975). Supervision, on the other hand, requires minimal social exchange as the leader's focus is on power and authority instead of the interpersonal relationship. The differentiation of leadership from supervision is the foundation for the development of LMX. LMX suggests that supervisors who influence as leaders develop higher quality relationships with their followers than supervisors who influence through supervisors (Dansereau et al., 1975). High quality relationships where the supervisor influences as a leader, include frequent social exchanges that allow the supervisor and the follower to develop trust, mutual obligation, and respect (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). In the early development of LMX, followers who developed high-quality relationships were identified as the "in-group" (Dansereau et al., 1975). On the other hand, in low quality relationships, followers had minimal contact with their supervisor and a lack of, trust, mutual obligation and respect dominated the relationship. Followers of the low-quality relationships were identified as the "out-group" (Dansereau et al., 1975). The in-group/out-group facet became a staple of the LMX theory, demonstrating that supervisors do in fact develop different dyadic relationships with different followers. Additionally, followers of the "in-group" are found to have an overall better work experience than followers in the "out-group" (Gerstner & Day, 1997). In short, LMX was the first leadership theory to acknowledge as role exchanges occur

between the supervisor and the follower, differentiated relationships based on those exchanges form and effect the follower's experience in the workplace (Case, 1998; Chaudhry et al., 2021; Gerstner & Day, 1997; Kim et al., 2017).

Another important aspect of differentiation within LMX, is the recognition of the different tasks that occur in the organizational setting. Similar to Ilgen and Hollenbeck's (1992) job-role differentiation model which identified established and emergent tasks, within the framework of LMX, job tasks have been described as structured and unstructured job tasks (Graen & Scandura, 1987). Structured tasks are tasks that are written in the job description for the member and are known by both parties (Graen & Scandura, 1987). Unstructured tasks are undetermined tasks that extend beyond what is required in the employment contract (Sparrowe & Liden, 1997). Simply stated, LMX uses the terms structured and unstructured tasks while role theory uses the terms established and emergent tasks to differentiate the tasks of individuals in the workplace. More specifically, unstructured tasks are the tasks that are not known by both members. Some refer to these tasks as the "other duties as assigned." From the LMX framework, which focuses on the relationship, unstructured tasks allow a leader to provide possible stretch assignments for a follower while allowing a follower the opportunity to show a leader their willingness and ability to complete tasks beyond what is written in their job description. While there are benefits to both the supervisor and the follower with unstructured tasks, these tasks also highlight the complexity of the dyadic relationship within organizational structures by introducing unknown expectations to the relationship. Specifically, unstructured tasks allow for "(a) multiple task formation, (b) several alternative means of performance, and (c) a number of different goals" (Graen &



Scandura, 1978, p. 176). Unstructured tasks are integral to the development of the dyadic relationship as they provide a deeper opportunity for the supervisor and follower to interact and to learn each other's behaviors and responses to situations. Ultimately, unstructured tasks serve as a foundation for the day-to-day interaction of the supervisor and the follower as unstructured tasks are common in the workplace. Therefore, the distinction between structured and unstructured tasks assists in understanding how different dyadic relationships are formed.

### **The Formation of LMX Relationships: The Role-Making Process**

In addition to acknowledging the existence of differentiated relationships, early research (Graen & Scandura, 1987) and (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1991, 1995; Uhl-Bien & Graen, 1993) recognized that the development of the dyadic relationship exists in stages. Through examination of the supervisor and follower's behaviors, role expectations begin to emerge. As role expectations form, organizational standards are established, and unknown behaviors become known. The process of developing role expectations is described as role emergence by Graen and Scandura (1987) and as the Leadership Making model by Graen & Uhl-Bien (1991, 1995) and Uhl-Bien & Graen (1993). Both the role emergence process and the Leadership Making Model are exhibited in three phases: (1) role taking or the "stranger phase", (2) role making or "acquaintance stage", and (3) role routinization or "mature partnership" (Graen & Scandura, 1987; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1991, 1995; Uhl-Bien & Graen, 1993). During the initial phase of role taking, a new relationship is formed between the supervisor and follower, with each learning about the other. This is a period of information seeking for both parties. Graen and Scandura (1987) described role taking as the "sampling phase wherein the superior attempts to

discover the relevant talents and motivations of the member through iterative testing sequences” (p. 180). Additionally, the exchanges occurring between the supervisor and the follower are purely transactional based on the job description of the follower (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1991,1995; Uhl-Bien & Graen, 1993). With the information gathered in the role taking phase, the supervisor and follower begin to have known behavioral expectations about the other and they enter the role making phase or “acquaintance stage.” Through this evolution of the dyadic relationship, the nature of the relationship between the supervisor and the follower begins to become known (Graen & Scandura, 1987). Social exchanges move beyond transaction and greater information and resources are shared (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1991,1995; Uhl-Bien & Graen, 1993). Following, role routinization then occurs when the behaviors of the supervisor and the follower are not only known, but are interlocked (Graen & Scandura, 1987). A further explanation of role emergence follows.

Role taking occurs early in the relationship when the dyad is new for both members and there are many unknowns (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1991,1995; Uhl-Bien & Graen, 1993). During this “stranger phase,” the supervisor and the follower test the boundaries of each other and the relationship as they seek information from each other (Graen & Scandura, 1987). The supervisor may ask the follower to complete unstructured job tasks as a gauge of their competence and their willingness to complete said tasks. During this phase, the supervisor sends requests to the follower and the follower either accepts or rejects the request (Graen & Scandura, 1987; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1991,1995; Uhl-Bien & Graen, 1993). For example, the supervisor may ask the follower’s opinion on an issue or problem to learn how the follower would respond. Upon receiving the

question from the supervisor, the follower then decides whether to offer their opinion or not. Based on the interaction, members of the dyad begin to formulate expectations about the other based on the behavior (e.g., response) received by the other. Thus, the supervisor and the follower gather integral information about the other through this process of role taking.

With the information gathered in the role taking phase, the supervisor and follower begin the process of role making as they move from strangers to acquaintances. In the role making phase known behavioral expectations about the other are present. As the dyadic relationship continues to progress, the follower begins to have a more active role in the relationship and can initiate action (Graen & Scandura, 1987). The role making phase is defined as the process, “the superior and member evolve how each will behave in various problematic situations and begin to define the nature of their dyadic relationship” (Graen & Scandura, 1987, p. 181). During this phase, the supervisor and follower continue to test the relationship through unstructured tasks. In doing so, the supervisor and follower build interdependence (Graen & Scandura, 1987). Additionally, the supervisor and follower establish an understanding of what resources (e.g., information, influence, tasks, job latitude, support, and attention) can be provided by the supervisor and are desired by the follower (Graen & Scandura, 1987). The allocation of resources introduces the concept of reciprocity which is foundational to the role making phase (Graen & Scandura, 1987). With reciprocity established, the dyadic relationship becomes more routinized as behavioral expectations are known.

The role routinization phase exists when the behaviors of the supervisor and follower are interlocked (Graen & Scandura, 1987). Additionally, the supervisor and

follower have developed a “functional interdependence” with each other (Graen & Scandura, 1987). Ultimately, in role routinization, the dyadic relationship has developed, “trust, respect, loyalty, liking, intimacy, support, openness, and honesty” (Graen & Scandura, 1987, p. 184). The relationship exchanges are both behavioral and emotional with mutual respect, trust, and obligation continuously growing (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Furthermore, mutual expectations are known and are widely visible. Relationships that reach the stage of role routinization are recognized as “mature partnership” exchanges (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1991,1995; Uhl-Bien & Graen, 1993). Dyadic relationships that reach role routinization increase the operational efficiency of the dyad, and thus the organization. As collaboration, especially with unstructured tasks, between the supervisor and the follower, increases, so does functioning (Graen & Scandura, 1987).

An examination of the role emergence process explicates how the individual behaviors of both parties coordinates into teamwork and ultimately organizational success (Graen & Scandura, 1987; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1991,1995; Uhl-Bien & Graen, 1993). It is important to recognize that each of the phases demonstrates the linear development of the dyadic relationship, with recognition that the relationship can revert to an earlier phase at any time (Graen & Scandura, 1987). Additionally, the role emergence phases do not exist on a fixed timeline. Each dyad is unique; therefore, each dyad progresses through the phases on a timeline that is conducive to the supervisor and follower (Graen & Scandura, 1987). Through the role emergence process, numerous factors are present that affect the dyad. Often these factors are social in nature; thus, it is important to understand how social exchanges affect the supervisor/follower exchange.

## **Factors affecting LMX**

High-quality dyadic relationships are characterized by mutual trust, respect, and obligation (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). However, for those characteristics to be reached by the members of the dyad, certain factors, from the supervisor, the follower, and the interaction between the two, must be present (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Numerous early studies in LMX discovered specific determinates or factors of high-quality exchange relationships (Graen, 1976; Graen et al., 1982; Graen & Schiemann, 1978). In their meta-analysis of determinates and consequences of LMX, Dulebohn et al. (2012) identified nine follower characteristics, five supervisor characteristics, and seven interpersonal relationship characteristics that research has identified as factors affecting high-quality exchange relationships. The follower characteristics are: (a) competence, (b) agreeableness, (c) conscientiousness, (d) extraversion, (e) neuroticism, (f) openness, (g) positive affectivity, (h) negative affectivity, and (i) locus of control (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Kinicki & Vecchio, 1994; Martin et al., 2005). Conversely, the supervisor characteristics identified are: (a) supervisor's expectations of followers, (b) contingent reward behavior, (c) transformational leadership, (d) extraversion, and (e) agreeableness (Dulebohn et al., 2012). Furthermore, the following seven interpersonal relationship factors were identified: (a) perceived similarity, (b) affect/liking, (c) ingratiation (supervisor reported), (d) ingratiation (follower reported), (e) self-promotion, (f) assertiveness, and (g) leader trust (Dulebohn et al., 2012). The subsequent paragraphs explicate the factors for each group, follower, supervisor, and interpersonal relationship in detail.

### ***Follower Characteristics in LMX***

**Competence.** During role-taking and role-making, supervisors are learning about their followers including their individual capabilities. As supervisors present tasks, both structured and unstructured, to their follower, the response of the follower to the given task is evaluated by the supervisor. Research has examined this interaction and found followers who accept tasks and show competence in completing tasks are more likely to form high-quality LMX relationships with their supervisor (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Graen & Scandura, 1987). Thus, research has posited that a follower's competence is a strong predictor of a high-quality LMX relationship (Nahrgang & Seo, 2016; Day & Crain, 1992; Dockery & Steiner, 1990; Dulebohn et al., 2012).

**Personality Characteristics (agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, neuroticism, and openness).** Personality characteristics have also been identified as predictors of LMX relationships (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Nahrgang & Seo, 2016; Dulebohn et al., 2012; Phillips & Bedeian, 1994). Specifically, the Big Five personality factors (agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, neuroticism, and openness) have been examined as determinants to dyadic relationships. Of the five characteristics, Barrick & Mount (1991) found conscientiousness to be the most correlated with job performance. Dulebohn et al. (2012), however, found support for agreeableness, conscientiousness, and extraversion as significant predictors of a follower's positive perception of an LMX relationship. A follower's openness (e.g., new ideas, innovation) did not significantly predict the LMX relationship (Dulebohn et al., 2012). Agreeableness is positively associated with reciprocity (Perugini et al., 2003), a known key factor in LMX, thus, a follower's agreeableness is integral to the formation of a high-quality LMX

relationship. Additionally, a follower with a preference for extraversion is predicted to be able to develop higher quality LMX relationships because of their preference for social interactions (Phillips & Bedeian, 1994). Given that LMX relationships require sociability and a desire to interact with the other member in the relationship, the follower must be willing to socially interact with the supervisor to develop a relationship (Dulebohn et al., 2012). In addition to identifying personality characteristics of followers as determinants to high-quality LMX relationships, scholars have also found that personality similarities between a supervisor and a follower can positively impact the development of the LMX relationship (Bauer & Green, 1996; Phillips & Bedeian, 1994; Zhang et al., 2012).

**Affectivity (positive and negative).** Emotions are prevalent in all human interactions, including the building of dyadic relationships. Broadly speaking, there are two dominant dimensions of emotional experiences, positive affect, and negative affect (Watson & Clark, 1992; Watson & Tellegen, 1985). Positive affect is described as a positive mood state. Individuals who demonstrate a positive affect are satisfied, joyful, interested, excited, confident, and alert (Watson & Clark, 1992). Contrastingly, “negative affect is a general dimension of subjective distress and dissatisfaction” (Watson & Clark, 1992, p. 443). Typical behaviors associated with a negative affect are fear, anger, sadness, guilt, and disgust (Watson & Clark, 1992). Both affects have been examined in relationship with LMX (Hochwarter, 2003; Hochwarter, 2005; Hui et al., 1999; Phillips & Bedeian, 1994).

Hochwarter (2003) utilized LMX as a mediating variable when addressing the relationship between politicking, job satisfaction, and affective commitment amongst police officers. Positive affect and LMX were found to be predictors of job satisfaction

(Hochwarter, 2003). In Hochwarter's follow-up study (2005) with a similar population, he examined the linearity of LMX and job tension based on the affect, or disposition, of an individual. His findings illustrated employees with high negative affect and moderate LMX relationships reported high amounts of job tension. For those individuals with low negative affect the relationship between job tension and LMX was linear with job tension increasing with the quality of the LMX relationship. Similarly, for employees with high positive affect, an inverse linear relationship existed where an individual's job tension decreased as the quality of the LMX relationship increased. Interestingly, for employees with low positive affect, individuals who reported moderate LMX relationships reported the lowest job tension. These findings demonstrate the complexity of the relationship between LMX, positive and negative affect, and job tension, highlighting that high quality LMX relationships are not desired by all employees (Hochwarter, 2005).

Magnussen & Kim (2016) expanded the thinking on the relationship between affectivity and LMX relationships in their study exploring political savviness, a cognitive-affective behavior of social effectiveness. In examining the political savviness of first-year interns, they found interns with strong political savvy skills were able to develop higher-quality LMX relationships than their counterparts (Magnussen & Kim, 2016). Expanding the research to a different culture, Hui et al. (1999) examined the relationship between affectivity and LMX in a Chinese context. In their study of employees of a large Chinese manufacturing company, they found employees with a negative affect have lower LMX with their supervisors, which is to be expected. Additionally, LMX mediated the effects of negative affectivity on performance (Hui et al., 1999). Dulebohn et al.'s (2012) meta-analysis confirmed a positive association with LMX and positive affect, in addition, a



follower's negative affect was negatively related with LMX. While research illustrates the relationship between LMX and affectivity, there are some contradictory findings (e.g., Horchwarter, 2005), suggesting this is an area for continued research.

**Locus of Control.** In the seminal study on dyadic relationship as a model of leadership, Dansereau et al., (1975) examined follower determinants of higher education professionals working in a residence life department. They focused on three determinants including, negotiating latitude, leadership attention, and leadership support (Dansereau et al., 1975). Negotiating leadership was defined as “the extent to which a superior is willing to consider requests from a member (follower) concerning role development” (Dansereau et al., 1975, p. 51). Stated differently, negotiating latitude is essentially the degree to which the supervisor allows the follower the ability to influence their own role within the organization. In other words, does the supervisor allow the follower a voice in how their role is developed within the organization or, does the supervisor dictate the role development autocratically? Dansereau et al. (1975) found negotiating latitude to be the key determinate of the quality of the relationship between the supervisor and the follower. If the follower received time and space to negotiate their job-related matters from the supervisors, a higher-quality relationship was formed. Additionally, Dansereau et al. (1975) found that the followers in the high-quality relationship received more attention and support from the supervisor, as well as being liked more by their leader. Contrastingly, the followers who did not receive job latitude from their supervisor (the out-group), reported receiving less leader attention and support. However, the out-group followers identified wanting more attention and support from their supervisors than the in-group followers (Dansereau et al., 1975). While Dansereau et al. (1975) identified this

antecedent as negotiating latitude, future studies defined it as the follower's locus of control (Martin et al., 2005; Phillips & Bedeian, 1994). When followers feel a strong sense of internal locus of control, they are more initiative driven, proactive in seeking feedback, communicating frequently, and secure in negotiating their roles and tasks (Dulebohn et al., 2012). Thus, locus of control has been identified as an integral follower determinant to high-quality LMX relationships (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Kinicki & Vecchio, 1994; Martin et al., 2005).

### ***Supervisor Characteristics in LMX***

In addition to examining follower driven determinants, because of the power differential in the relationship, it is argued that the leader's behavior, as determinants, can have more influence over the relationship (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Liden et al., 1997). Thus, it is vital to examine the supervisor characteristics that influence the LMX relationship. The supervisor characteristics identified as determinants are: (a) supervisor's expectations of followers, (b) contingent reward behavior, (c) transformational leadership, (d) extraversion, and (e) agreeableness (Dulebohn et al., 2012). Each are discussed in detail in the proceeding subsections.

**Supervisor's Expectations of Followers.** High quality LMX relationships are built on trust, respect, and mutual obligation (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Thus, to build trust, a supervisor must provide clear expectations to their followers to ensure they understand how the supervisor defines success (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Liden et al., 1993). The interaction of sharing expectations and allowing a follower to meet the stated expectations cultivates an environment for healthy social exchange, a foundational component of LMX. Liden et al. (1993) found that supervisor expectations established

early in the relationship (0 to 5 days) were strong predictors of the quality of the LMX relationship at various future times. Interestingly, scholars have noted that a supervisor's expectations of a follower are better predictors of the leader's perception of the relationship than their own formal job evaluation of the follower's performance (Liden et al., 1993). Dulebohn et al. (2012) confirmed the positive relationship between supervisors providing clear expectations to a follower and a high-quality LMX. Followers who know what is expected of them, are more inclined to perform extra-role duties as well as engage with the supervisor, thus building the trust, respect, and mutual obligation within the relationship (Dulebohn et al., 2012). Thus, it is important that supervisors provide clear expectations to their followers.

**Contingent Reward Behavior.** Similar to providing clear expectations, supervisors who provide feedback, awards, and recognize their followers for their accomplishments create higher-quality LMX relationships (Dulebohn et al., 2012). These behaviors, providing feedback, awards, and recognition, are known as contingent reward behaviors (Avolio et al., 1999). Each of these behaviors, while argued to be transactional in nature, are opportunities for a social exchange between the supervisor and the follower. Furthermore, followers who receive praise for their work, can feel a sense of obligation to their supervisor, increasing the LMX relationship (Wayne et al., 2002). In fact, Dulebohn et al. (2012) found a significant positive relationship between contingent reward behavior and high-quality LMX. This finding highlights the impact of transactional social exchanges between supervisors and followers and informs supervisors that not all interactions need to be transformational. Simply stated, there is value in transactional social exchanges.

**Transformational Leadership.** In contrast to transactional leadership such as contingent reward behavior, transformational leadership is characterized by a leader's articulation of a vision, acting in accordance with said vision, and encouraging group goals (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). With a focus on group goals, transformational leaders must inspire and motivate their followers to demonstrate success and organizational effectiveness. Thus, it is argued that the social exchange that occurs through motivation and inspiration will create a high-quality LMX relationship (Dulebohn et al., 2012). This finding was confirmed by Dulebohn et al.'s (2012) meta-analysis.

**Personality Characteristics (extraversion and agreeableness).** Individual personality attributes of a supervisor influence the development of the dyadic relationship as well. Specifically, extraversion and agreeableness are two known personality variables to be integral to the development of the LMX. Extraversion has been examined in the leadership literature as a key attribute for a leader (Bono & Judge, 2004; Judge et al., 2002). In addition to being highly sociable, extraverted leaders have been identified by their followers as more effective leaders (Judge et al., 2002). As extroverted leaders are more likely to interact with their follower's it is presumed that extraverted leaders can develop high-quality LMX relationships with their followers (Dulebohn et al., 2012). Similar to extraversion, agreeableness is characterized by, "friendliness, sociability, warmth, compassion, and affability" (Dulebohn et al., 2012, p.1723). Additionally, leaders who demonstrate agreeableness are more inclined to be cooperative and open to reciprocal interactions. Thus, supervisors who demonstrate agreeableness can develop high-quality LMX relationships with their followers. To summarize, both extraversion

and agreeableness have been found to have a positive relationship with LMX (Dulebohn et al., 2012).

### *Interpersonal Characteristics in LMX*

While individual variables of both the follower and the supervisor act as determinants, foundationally, LMX also includes the relationship between the supervisor and the follower. Thus, it is imperative to examine the determinants connected to the relationship between the supervisor and the follower. The following seven interpersonal relationship characteristics were identified: (a) perceived similarity, (b) affect/liking, (c) ingratiation (supervisor reported), (d) ingratiation (follower reported), (e) self-promotion, (f) assertiveness, and (g) leader trust (Dulebohn et al., 2012). The above-mentioned characteristics examine the perceptions of each member of the relationship on the other, providing further clarity on the quality of the relationship from both perspectives.

**Perceived similarity.** Findings from social psychology confirm that people are attracted to and are more comfortable with people who have similar interests, values, and attitudes (Byrne, 1971). Thus, LMX research has examined perceived similarity to understand if the perception of similarity by both parties influences the quality of the LMX relationship (Engle & Lord, 1997; Dulebohn et al., 2012; Liden et al., 1993; Phillips & Bedeian, 1994; Turban & Jones, 1988). Importantly, Turban & Jones (1988) found perceived similarity by both the supervisor and the follower to provide, “less role ambiguity, more confidence and trust in the supervisor, and greater influence over the supervisor” (p.233) for the follower. In the role-taking phase of role emergence, Liden et al., 1993) found perceived similarity to be a significant predictor of LMX relationships only when both variables were evaluated by the same source (e.g., the leader’s

perceptions of similarity were related to the leader evaluated exchange). Phillips & Bedeian (1994) expanded Liden et al's (1993) work on perceived similarity and found attitudinal similarity to have a strong relationship with the quality of the LMX, regardless of the source. As new supervisors and followers begin a relationship, their initial perceived similarities with each other are crucial to the development of their LMX relationship. To further understand the role of perceived similarity and the quality of LMX relationships, Engle and Lord (1997) examined cognitive correlates including perceived similarity of supervisors and followers of a midwestern electric company. Their findings are supportive of Phillips & Bedeian's (1994) conclusion that perceived similarity significantly predicts the quality of LMX relationships. Additionally, they found liking to be a mediating factor to perceived similarity and LMX quality (Engle & Lord, 1997). Thus, followers who perceive similarities between themselves and their supervisor are more inclined to like their supervisor and thus have a higher quality LMX. An explanation of liking as an determinant explicates this notion further.

**Affect/Liking.** Research has shown that liking and high-quality LMX relationships have a strong correlation (Engle & Lord, 1997; Liden et al., 1993; Wayne & Ferris, 1990). As noted by Dulebohn et al. (2012), "humans typically desire to form favorable relationships with people they like, and LMX relationships are no exception" (p. 1723). In examining the relationship between liking and quality of LMX relationship, Wayne & Ferris (1990) found performance rating to be determined by the supervisor's liking of their follower in both laboratory and field studies. Similar to their findings on perceived similarities, Liden et al. (1993) discovered liking, as perceived by both supervisors and followers, to be highly influential to the LMX relationship during the

role-taking phase. Engle and Lord (1997) confirmed these findings thus, research has confirmed a strong relationship between liking and the quality of LMX.

**Influence Tactics (ingratiation (supervisor supported and follower supported), self-promotion, and assertiveness).** Dyadic relationships are processes of incremental influences (Graen & Scandura, 1987). Within the dyad, influence is bi-directional, meaning there is downward influence led by the supervisor as well as upward influence directed by the follower. Specifically, Dulebohn et al. (2012) identified three influence tactics that are determinants to LMX relationships, ingratiation (supervisor supported and follower supported), self-promotion, and assertiveness. Ingratiation is defined as “a set of influence behaviors designed to improve one’s interpersonal attractiveness and are used by followers to gain the approval of supervisors who distribute desired rewards” (Deluga & Perry, 1994, p. 68). Ingratiating activity has been categorized into three categories, other enhancement or flattery, opinion conformity, and self-presentation (Jones, 1964). Within LMX research, ingratiation has been reported by both supervisors and followers as a determinant to LMX.

**Leader Trust.** Trust has been defined as the “willingness to be vulnerable” (Mayer et al., 1995). As the dyadic relationship is being formed and moving through the role emergence process, both the supervisor and the follower are simultaneously creating an environment for the other to be vulnerable or not and perceiving an openness to be vulnerable by the other. This interaction then either creates the foundation for trust with the other or not. Dulebohn et al. (2012) posited that a supervisor’s trust is positively related to a follower’s perceptions of the LMX relationship. In other words, if a supervisor has trust in their follower, the follower will perceive a higher quality LMX

relationship with their supervisor. This conclusion is strengthened by the notion that high-quality LMX relationships are built on a follower's willingness to complete unstructured or extra-role tasks (Graen & Scandura, 1987) and a supervisor's willingness to provide the opportunity to complete such tasks. The simple act of giving a follower the opportunity is an act of trust by the supervisor (Lewicki et al., 2006; McAllister, 1995)

In examination of the relationship between trust and LMX, Brower et al. (2000) argues for trust to be measured from both the perspective of the leader as well as the follower, acknowledging that perceptions of trust by each member of the dyad could be different. Further, they recognize that "trust is a measure of a construct that exists within an individual. In fact, there is no objective measure of trust" (Brower et al., 2000, p. 231). Thus, the perception of trust within the relationship and by each member, needs to be examined by both members to fully understand trust within a dyad. Brower et al., 2000 acknowledge that, "only the leader can assess the extent to which he or she trusts a particular subordinate" (p.231). However, the follower's perception of the supervisor's trust influences the follower's behaviors and thus the quality of the LMX relationship (Brower et al., 2000). Following the recommendation by Brower et al. (2000) and recognizing that trust is not objective and is a complex construct, this study will examine trust from the perception of both members of the dyad while acknowledging that leader trust in a follower has been the most heavily studied in the LMX literature (Dulebohn et al., 2012).

Following the meta-analysis of Dulebohn et al. (2012), numerous determinants from the three dimensions of LMX, the supervisor, the follower, and the interpersonal relationship (Graen et al., 1977) have been discussed. The understanding of the



determinants provides the foundation for understanding the differentiated relationships that exist in dyadic relationships. Specifically, the quality of the dyadic relationships. While the examination of factors affecting LMX has been examined quantitatively, such examination tells us little about the actual human experience, therefore, it is essential to understand the outcomes that these factors influence.

### **Outcomes**

LMX posits that, “the quality of the relationship that develops between a leader and a follower is predictive of outcomes at the individual, group, and organizational levels of analysis” (Gerstner & Day, 1997, p.827). Therefore, much of the research on LMX has focused on the relationship between LMX and outcomes (Epitropaki & Martin, 2016). As Dulebohn et al. (2012) noted, the quality of the supervisor-follower relationship determines critical organizational outcomes. The outcomes examined in the LMX literature include behavioral, attitudinal, role status, and perceptual measures (Dulebohn et al., 2012). Continuing to follow the framework provided by the meta-analysis completed by Dulebhorn et al. (2012), these outcomes are relevant to the understanding the role of the sport supervisor and more specifically, the relationship between the sport supervisor and head coach, job attitudes including job satisfaction and organizational commitment, role states, and empowerment. Perceptual measures including procedural and distributive justice are not included in this review as they are outside the scope of this study. Additionally, satisfaction with pay as an outcome is also not discussed as this study is not examining the monetary elements of the sport supervisor and head coach dyad.

### ***Job Attitudes***

Job attitudes is defined as “evaluations of one’s job that express one’s feelings toward, beliefs about, and attachment to one’s job” (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012, p. 344). Most of the research on LMX and job attitudes has focused on the evaluative components, including job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Epitropaki & Martin, 2016). In the broadest sense, job satisfaction has been described as the degree to which people like their jobs (Agho et al., 1992). Considered a global construct, job satisfaction can include multiple elements of satisfaction including satisfaction with work, pay, and supervision as examples. In their meta-analytic review of LMX research, Gerstner and Day (1997) found evidence for significant relationships between LMX and job performance, satisfaction with supervision, and overall satisfaction. Dulebohn et al. (2012) confirmed Gerstner and Day’s (1997) earlier analysis as a significant relationship was found between LMX and job satisfaction. To date, empirical research has consistently found significant relationships between LMX and job satisfaction further illustrating the importance of high-quality dyadic relationships within organizations (Epitropaki & Martin, 2016).

While job satisfaction focuses on an individual’s fondness of their job, organizational commitment is focused on an individual’s connection to the organization. Research has identified three main components of organizational commitment: (1) an individual’s belief in the organization’s goals, (2) an individual’s desire to exert energy for the organization, and (3) an individual’s desire to belong (e.g., membership) to the organization (Porter et al., 1974). Allen and Meyer (1997) developed a model of organizational commitment that includes affective, normative, and continuance

organizational commitment. Dulebohn et al. (2012) examined organizational commitment from the lens of affective and normative commitment, where affective commitment is the emotional connection an individual builds with an organization, and normative commitment is the obligation one feels to an organization's goals. Similar to job satisfaction, empirical research has consistently found a significant relationship between LMX and organizational commitment (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Epitropaki & Martin, 2016; Gerstner & Day, 1997; Kent & Chelladurai, 2001).

The significant relationships between job satisfaction and LMX and organizational commitment and LMX are not surprising. As supervisors and followers build their relationship, the more they like their supervisor, the more likely they are to have a positive effect to the organization as well. In this sense, liking serves as an individual determinant as well as an organizational outcome. Similarly, if a supervisor has established trust with their follower, that follower is more inclined to feel a sense of obligation to the organization, thus increasing their organizational commitment (Wayne et al., 2002). In this sense, the supervisor acts as a proxy to the organization (Eisenberger et al., 1986) and has the ability through LMX to develop highly committed followers.

### ***Role States***

Role states focus on the expectations shared between the supervisor and the follower and the clarity, or lack of clarity, shared between the two. Gerstner and Day (1997) found significant relationships between role conflict (negative association) and role clarity (positive association). Additionally, in an experiment of managers who had been trained on LMX and the process of role making, Graen et al. (1982) found significant improvements in numerous work outcomes including, role clarity. Similarly,

Dansereau et al. (1975) found followers in high-quality LMX relationships indicate a higher level of understanding of the expectations of their superior in addition to “receiving higher amounts of information, influence, confidence, and concern from the superior” (p.70). Thus, to form mature LMX relationships, supervisors need to provide clear role expectations to their followers.

### ***Empowerment***

Empowerment is a perceptual outcome measure of LMX and comprises four dimensions, (1) meaningfulness, (2) impact, (3) competence, and (4) self-determination of how people view their work roles (Spreitzer, 1995; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Followers who feel a strong sense of empowerment from their supervisor, will feel support, have access to information, and be provided challenging work assignments as examples. Young et al. (2021) found high-quality LMX relationships increase follower’s perceptions of their empowerment. They indicated that during the social exchange between the leader and the follower, resources granted to followers have the potential to satisfy psychological needs of the followers thus increasing the quality of the dyadic relationship. Dulebohn et al. (2012) found support for followers to perceive a higher quality LMX relationship with their supervisor when they feel a sense of empowerment. Therefore, empowerment has been identified as an outcome of high-quality LMX relationships.

### **LMX in Sport**

LMX has been examined in the context of sport organizations to explain the dyadic relationships that exists within this environment. Studies have focused on the coach/athlete relationship (Case, 1998; Caliskan, 2015; Cranmer, 2016; Cranmer &

Myers, 2015) and the relationship between board chairs and volunteer board members (Bang, 2011, 2013; Hoye, 2004, 2006). Interestingly, LMX has been used minimally within intercollegiate athletics. In fact, only two studies have utilized LMX specifically within the context of intercollegiate athletics. Sagas and Cunningham (2004) assessed head coach/assistant coach dyads and Kent and Chelladurai (2001) examined administrator/staff dyads, but the sport supervisor/head coach dyad has not yet been examined.

### ***Coach/Athlete LMX***

The coach/athlete relationship has been a commonly studied dyad in the sport context. In an early examination of LMX and the coach/athlete relationship, Case (1998) examined the tenets of LMX by exploring the relationship between starters and non-starters of high school-aged females attending a camp and their respective camp head coach. Athletes who indicated themselves as starters reported higher quality LMX relationships with their head coaches (Case, 1998). This finding was confirmed by Cranmer (2016) illustrating that within the coach/athlete dyad, starters are more likely to be considered in-group members with the coach, whereas non-starters will likely feel like members of the out-group. Cranmer (2016) also found that a coach's emotional support influences the development of the LMX with the athlete. Thus, while not all athletes can be starters, coaches can provide emotional support to all players to decrease the differentiation of relationships between starters and non-starters. In addition to emotional support, coaches who employ reciprocal communication strategies with their players can build higher quality LMX relationships with their players regardless of starting status (Cranmer, 2015). Expanding the influence of the LMX relationship between a coach and

athlete, Cranmer (2015) found athletes who had high-quality LMX relationships with their coach also had better relationships with their teammates. Thus, further highlighting the importance of high quality LMX relationships between coaches and their athletes and the effect on the team.

### ***Head Coach/Assistant Coach Dyad***

While the dyad of head coach and assistant coach may be one of the more obvious dyads within the sport context, a dearth of research on this dyad through the lens of LMX exists. Currently, only Sagas and Cunningham (2004) have examined the relationship of the head coach and assistant coach utilizing LMX as the theoretical framework. Their study aimed to examine the LMX relationship between the head coach and assistant coach and the assistant coach's job and career satisfaction and to assess whether treatment discrimination based on race was evident within these dyads (Sagas & Cunningham, 2004). Utilizing the LMX-6 scale with a sample of NCAA Division I men's basketball assistant coaches, the results showed that higher-quality LMX relationships between the head coach and assistant coach positively impacted the job and career satisfaction of the assistant coach.

### ***Leader/Follower Dyad in Voluntary Sport Organizations***

Volunteer sport organizations provide a unique context to examine dyads as their members can include both paid (e.g., executives) and non-paid (e.g., volunteers) members (Hoye, 2004, 2006). Hoye (2004, 2006) examined the dyadic relationships present within voluntary organizations (executive/board chair; executive/board member; and board chair/board member) and board performance and how such relationships are developed. In the first stage of the study, members (executives, board chairs, and board

members) of voluntary sport organizations in Australia completed the LMX-7 scale to understand the relationships between the three groups (Hoye, 2004). In this setting, board members are identified as the out-group, as executives and board chairs develop higher-quality LMX relationships (Hoye, 2004). In his follow-up study focused on understanding how the relationships are developed, Hoye (2006) conducted semi-structured interviews of members (executives, board chairs, and board members) of the same organizations. The qualitative findings confirmed high-quality LMX relationship between executives and board chairs. Furthermore, this relationship between the executive and the board chair was found to be integral to the performance of the board (Hoye, 2006). Additionally, mutual respect and trust were found to be imperative to the establishment of a mature LMX relationship. Hoye (2006) found respect of an individual in the dyad to be tied to the perception of an individual's skills, knowledge and experience. Thus, those members who have something to offer the organization are more respected. The last major finding by Hoye (2006) was acknowledging mature relationships take time.

The study of LMX and volunteer sport organizations was continued by Bang (2011, 2013). Including members from a variety of positions (e.g., presidents, vice presidents, board members, coordinators, and coaches) within various volunteer sport programs in the United States, Bang (2011) confirmed that within volunteer organizations high-quality LMX relationships influence both job satisfaction and intention to stay. Using the LMX multi-dimensional model (LMX-MDM) which includes 4 dimensions (affect, loyalty, contribution, and professional respect) (Liden & Maslyn, 1998), Bang (2011) included both supervisors and followers in his study. Specifically, he found

followers value a supervisors professional knowledge while supervisor's have a strong desire for affect with their followers. In other words, followers in volunteer sport organizations are satisfied and stay with the organization because they respect the knowledge of the supervisor and see the experience as a learning opportunity. Supervisors, on the other hand, stay involved because they enjoy the relationship with their fellow members. In a follow-up study with the same population, Bang (2013) examined age as a moderator between job satisfaction and LMX with volunteer sport organization members. Most notably, it was found when younger volunteers had high levels of respect for their supervisor's knowledge and competence, they were more satisfied with their volunteer role in the organization (Bang, 2013). Additionally, a strong relationship between job satisfaction and intention to stay was present for older volunteers. These findings illustrate relationships built within volunteer organizations between supervisors and followers influence multiple outcomes including, job satisfaction, intention to stay, and board performance.

#### ***Athletic Administrator/Follower LMX***

In the only known study examining the relationship between athletic administrator and follower through the theoretical lens of LMX, Kent and Chelladurai (2001) used LMX and the dimensions of transformational leadership as mediating variables to understand if leadership trickles down from the athletic director, through middle managers (e.g., assistant or associate athletic directors), to third-tier employees. Utilizing the LMX-7 scale developed by Graen et al. (1982), third tier staff members completed the scale to indicate their perceptions of (a) transformational leadership of their athletic director, (b) quality of the LMX relationship between themselves and their direct report



middle manager, (c) their performance on organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB) (e.g., extra-role behaviors), and (d) their organizational commitment (Kent & Chelladurai, 2001).

Their findings showed that LMX correlated with two dimensions of transformational leadership, charismatic leadership, and individualized consideration, as well as with OCB. The correlation with individualized consideration, is not surprising given LMX's focus on differentiated relationships. In transformational leadership, the dimension of individualized consideration focuses on a leader's ability to "listen carefully to the individual needs of followers" (Northouse, 2016, p. 169), thus recognizing and developing differentiated relationship with each follower. Therefore, it would be expected that third-tier employees who have a high quality LMX relationship with their middle manager would also perceive their supervisor to provide individualized consideration. The correlation with OCB is also not surprising. OCB, which is defined as, "those behaviors which are not formally prescribed, but yet are desired by an organization" (Schnake, 1991, p.736), looks beyond the tasks associated with the formal job description at the extra-role or unstructured tasks (Graen & Scandura, 1987). Thus, it would be predicted that third-tier employees who have a quality LMX with their middle manager, would be willing to demonstrate more OCB, or extra-role behaviors as part of the mature relationship developed. In addition to providing empirical justification between LMX, some dimensions of transformational leadership, and OCB, this study also confirmed that the leadership of middle managers in intercollegiate athletic departments matters (Kent & Chelladurai, 2001). However, Kent & Chelladurai (2001) focused on the administrator/staff relationship within intercollegiate athletic departments and not the

administrator/coach relationship. Thus, there is a need to understand the relationship between the administrator, as a supervisor, and a coach, as the follower. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the relationship between the sport supervisor and head coach.

An earlier study by Doherty and Danylchuk (1996) did examine the relationship of the coach and administrator, but through the theoretical lens of transformational/transactional leadership. Both head coaches and athletic administrators (e.g., athletic directors and assistant athletic directors) from Canadian institutions completed the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) (Bass & Avolio, 1991). The assistant athletic directors were confirmed to be sport supervisors and their head coaches were asked to participate in the study. Administrators were perceived to have mainly transformational leadership behavior. However, coaches reported administrators displayed individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation less often than the more leader-centered dimensions of transformational leadership, idealized influence and attributed charisma (Doherty & Danylchuk, 1996). Doherty and Danylchuk (1996) hypothesized that the follower-centered behaviors of individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation may be more difficult to observe than the more leader-centric dimensions. However, they also noted that “the ADs/AADs may not be as adept, or interested, in the seemingly more demanding follower-centered behaviors” (Doherty & Danylchuk, 1996, p. 305). Additionally, the results from this study imply that coaches are more satisfied, perceived to be more effective, and are willing to perform extra-role behaviors for leaders that are involved (Doherty & Danylchuk, 1996). Ultimately, this study identified a strong desire by head coaches for athletic administrators to lead them

with individualized consideration (Doherty & Danylchuk, 1996). Thus, more research on the coach/administrator dyad is needed to understand the relationship from the perceptions of both the supervisor and the follower and through the theoretical lens of LMX to better understand the desired differentiation.

### **Summary**

LMX has a rich history within the context of organizations. Based on two tenets of being a dyadic relationship and acknowledging the development of differentiated relationships between the supervisor and the follower, LMX has expanded the study of leadership beyond a leader- or follower-centric focus (Dansereau et al, 1975). As the process of linking both members (Graen & Scandura, 1987), LMX distinguishes itself from other leadership models with its focus on both members of the relationship and the relationship itself (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Research in various contexts have discovered numerous factors that influence the development of the LMX relationship as well as various organizational outcomes (e.g., Dulebohn et al., 2012). Research has confirmed that high-quality LMX relationships lead to greater job satisfaction, job performance, and organizational commitment (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Epitropaki & Martin, 2016, Gerstner & Day, 1997). However, few studies have examined LMX relationships within the context of sports.

The use of LMX within the context of sport has been minimal to date even though there are numerous dyads to examine (e.g., coach/athlete, coach/supervisor, etc.). To date, the coach/athlete dyad and the supervisor/follower dyad within volunteer sport organizations have been examined the most. The coach/athlete studies confirmed research outside of sport that coaches, as supervisors, develop differentiated roles with

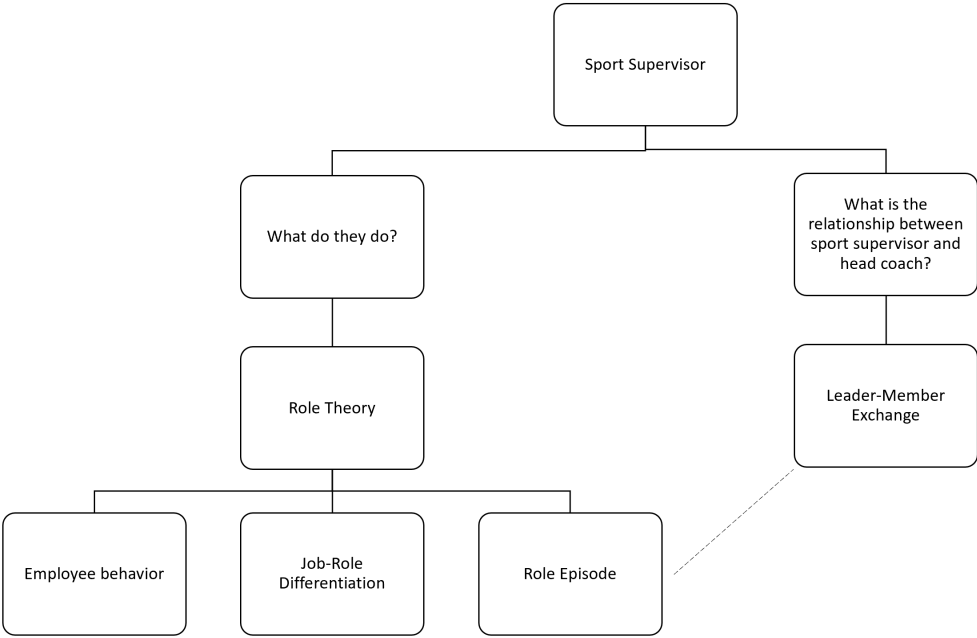
their athletes (Case, 1998; Cranmer, 2016). Furthermore, it was found that the coach/athlete role differentiation also influences athlete/athlete relationships (Cranmer, 2015) alluding to a trickle-down effect of leadership. The concept of cascading leadership was confirmed in the context of multi-level sport administrators in intercollegiate athletics (Kent & Chelladurai, 2001). Considering the dearth of research on the dyadic relationship of the sport supervisor and the head coach, this study aims to fill this gap and explore this relationship as an integral piece of the intercollegiate athletic department. Thus, this study will expand the literature on LMX by conducting research in a context, intercollegiate athletics, that has yet to be examined fully. Furthermore, this study will examine a dyad that exists within the middle level of an organization taking a unique approach to examining the supervisor/follower relationship.

### **Illustration of Theoretical Frameworks**

In this study, role theory and LMX provide the theoretical framework to examine the role of the sport supervisor in NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics. Figure 3 below illustrates how the two theoretical frameworks guide the purpose of this study to define and better understand the role of the sport supervisor and to explore the relationship between the sport supervisor and the head coach. Role theory guides the understanding of the role with the role episode process connecting role theory to LMX to further explicate the relationship between the sport supervisor and the head coach.

### **Figure 3**

*Illustration of Theoretical Frameworks*



## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

As mid-level administrators, sport supervisors play a critical role linking the individual teams and units to the organization (Constanzo & Tzoumpa, 2008; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992). Thus, the role of the sport supervisor is integral to the organizational success of the entire intercollegiate athletic department. Current research in intercollegiate athletics has focused on athletic directors (Grappendorf & Lough, 2006; Taylor & Hardin, 2016; Welty Peachey & Burton, 2011; Whisenant et al., 2002), coaches (Kim & Andrew, 2015; Turner & Chelladurai, 2005), and students (Watson, 2005; Watt & Moore, 2001). However, the specific role of sport supervisor in intercollegiate athletics has not been examined in research (Hardin et al., 2013; Ott & Beaumont, 2020).

Furthermore, research shows that relationships are central to the success of organizations. Specifically, high quality relationships have proven to provide greater job satisfaction, job performance, and organizational commitment to individuals within the organization (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Epitropaki & Martin, 2016; Gerstner & Day, 1997). In examining the organizational structure of intercollegiate athletic departments, a vital relationship is that of the sport supervisor and the head coach. However, to date, this dyadic relationship has not been examined. Therefore, the purpose of this study is two-fold. First, this study seeks to define and better understand the role of the sport supervisor. Second, this study explores the relationship between the sport supervisor and the head coach. Examining

this vital role and relationship in the organizational structure of intercollegiate athletic departments provides insights for athletic directors, sport supervisors, and head coaches into how to build effective sport supervisor/coach relationships, and thus develop organizational success. The key research questions guiding the study are, what is the role of the sport supervisor in NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletic departments and what is the relationship between the sport supervisor and the head coach.

### **Study Design**

This study used a qualitative research design, specifically a descriptive phenomenological approach, to understand the perceived role of the sport supervisor and the relationship between the sport supervisor and head coach in NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics. While most studies on role theory and LMX have utilized a quantitative approach (Chaudhry et al., 2021; Epitropaki & Martin, 2016; Gerstner & Day, 1997), a qualitative approach was appropriate as the purpose of this study was exploratory. Qualitative research brings meaning to the experiences of individuals or groups and uses words to intricately describe the experiences of participants, thus bringing a deep level of meaning and understanding. (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Glesne, 2016). Succinctly, qualitative research brings experiences to life. Furthermore, qualitative research recognizes the complexity of experiences and how multiple experiences can be interwoven and difficult to measure quantitatively (Glesne, 2016). This research design captured the role of the sport supervisor in NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics, as well as the experiences and the relationships of sport supervisors through the perceptions of both the sport supervisor and the head coach. Thus, providing meaning to the role and to the complex dyadic relationship that exists.

Additionally, qualitative research focuses on an “interpretive, naturalistic approach” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.7), exploring the research question and the participants in their natural environment. Qualitative research is not conducted in a fixed or predetermined environment (e.g., a lab), allowing the participant to be in their natural context and the researcher to observe the participant in their natural environment (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through unstructured observations and interviews, the researcher gains a deeper and more holistic meaning of the participant’s experience. Furthermore, qualitative research, especially the interpretative approach, recognizes that reality is a social construct that is derived by the individuals in the given context (Glesne, 2016). Thus, the perceptions of individuals are the reality. As noted by Ilgen and Hollenbeck (1992), through the eyes of a role theorist, roles are seen through shared experiences; thus, a qualitative approach will foster the understanding of the shared experiences to fully capture the role of a sport supervisor.

Qualitative research design also allows the data to be interpreted as a description of the participant’s experiences (Miles et al., 2020; Moustakas, 1994), providing depth and richness. Through data analysis in qualitative research, the participant’s voice is central and guides the researcher to discover the reality of their context. The researcher interprets the data based on theoretical foundations, but with an open mind for accepting and discovering new information and connections. This openness for interpretation allows the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the participant’s perception and to contextualize findings appropriately (Glesne, 2016).

Fourth, while most research in role theory and LMX has been conducted quantitatively (e.g., Graen et al., 1982), this study is focused on utilizing both theories from an interpretive framework to explore the role of the sport supervisor in NCAA Division I



intercollegiate athletics. With a dearth of research on this specific role in the organizational setting of NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics, it is necessary to take an exploratory approach to understand the perceptions of the role. These findings may provide insights as to what tasks are required of a sport supervisor and what characteristics do sport supervisors and head coaches expect in a successful sport supervisor/head coach relationship.

This study was conducted through the social constructivism interpretive framework as I sought to understand the experiences of sport supervisors in NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletic departments. The social constructivism framework focuses on developing subjective meanings of experiences to understand the complex experiences of the world being investigated (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, I relied on my participant's views and attitudes of the daily situations to understand the role of sport supervisor and the sport supervisor/head coach relationship.

### **Participant Sample**

The population for this study was sport supervisors and head coaches of NCAA Division I institutions. Purposeful and snowball sampling guided the selection process for participants in the study. Purposeful sampling was utilized to intentionally sample a set of participants who can explicate the role of sport supervisor (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2002). The goals of purposeful sampling in this study were to, (1) understand the role of sport supervisor in NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletic departments, and (2) understand the perceptions of the role from both members in the supervisor/head coach dyadic relationship. To be included in the study, participants needed to meet the criteria of being either a sport supervisor or head coach at an NCAA Division I institution. Patton's (2002) purposeful sampling strategy identified as criterion sampling was used to guide the

inclusion/exclusion criteria for the participants (Suri, 2011). Creswell and Poth (2018) acknowledge criterion sampling is appropriate when all participants in the study have the same lived experience to share. Criteria for both sport supervisors and head coaches were established. Sport supervisors were identified as those with assigned supervisory responsibilities to a specific team or teams (e.g., football, women's soccer) within the athletic department. Sport supervisors were selected based on the following criteria:

- An athletic administrator from a NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletic department.
- Formal designation of the role of sport supervisor for one or more sports as identified on the department staff directory or through the individual's on-line biography.

Consideration was made to include sport supervisors of both revenue (e.g., football) and non-revenue (e.g., track and field) sports, as well as male (e.g., men's basketball) and female (e.g., women's tennis) teams, and teams with male and female head coaches. Additionally, consideration was made to include sport supervisors from different gender and racial backgrounds. Gathering perspectives from multiple sport supervisors with various personal backgrounds and different sport supervision responsibilities ensured that a spectrum of sport supervisor's experiences was considered and examined (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Head coaches were identified as those with the formal title of 'head coach' (e.g., men's basketball head coach) of a specific sport as identified on the department staff directory. Head coaches from both revenue and non-revenue generating sports were included in the study. Additionally, other demographic differences, including gender and race, were taken into consideration to ensure a diverse population for the sample. Including sport supervisors

and head coaches from various backgrounds and associated with different sports will assist with triangulating the data. Patton (1999) noted that, “comparing the perspectives of people from different points of view” (p.1195), as a form of triangulating data sources, will contribute significantly to the credibility of the findings.

Snowball sampling also guided the selection of the participants. Snowball sampling is “obtaining knowledge of potential cases from people who meet research interests” (Glesne, 2016, p. 51). Given my personal history of working in the intercollegiate athletic industry for over ten years, I began the recruitment of participants using my established network of sport supervisors and head coaches at NCAA Division I institutions. In addition to interviewing those that agreed, I leveraged their networks and asked participants to identify and connect me with other potential participants as needed to reach saturation.

### **Sample Size**

There are various recommendations for sample sizes in phenomenology (Creswell & Poth, 2018), and many researchers contest how sample size can and should be determined in qualitative studies (Sim et al., 2018). For example, Dukes (1984) suggest a sample size of 3 to 10 participants, while Padilla (2003) attests that 1 participant can be sufficient. When examining sample size in qualitative research, the parallel topic is that of saturation. Saturation, first introduced and defined by Glaser & Strauss (1967), is the point at which no additional data are being found whereby the (researcher) can develop properties of the category. As he sees similar instances over and over again, the researcher becomes empirically confident that a category is saturated...when one category is saturated, nothing remains but to go on to new groups for data and other

categories, and attempt to saturate these categories also” (p. 64-65 found in Guest et al., 2006).

Based on this definition, saturation guided the sample size for this study. This study included 22 interviews (11 sport supervisors and 11 head coaches). Saturation was met through the iterative process of data analysis when it is was found that no new information was gleaned from participants.

According to institutionally reported data (NCAA, 2021) in 2020, over 3,000 employees held the job title of assistant or associate athletic director at NCAA Division I institutions. While this data suggests a large pool of athletic administrators who hold the title of assistant or associate athletic director, not every assistant or associate athletic director is a sport supervisor. Therefore, the number of athletic administrators who are sport supervisors is less than the 3,000 reported. Additionally, currently the role of sport supervisor is typically not delineated in titles within intercollegiate athletics (or NCAA data), thus it is unknown exactly how any athletic administrators occupy the role as a sport supervisor. Nevertheless, the large pool of NCAA Division I athletic administrators who hold the title of assistant or associate athletic director, provides a large enough sample size to reach saturation for this study.

The NCAA (2021) reported 6,754 individuals, both males and females, held the title of head coach of an NCAA Division I intercollegiate sport during the 2019-2020 academic year. Therefore, there is a large pool of NCAA Division I head coaches to access for this study.

## **Access and Entry**

As a former NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletic employee, I have worked at multiple universities and have developed a personal network of individuals working in the industry. Additionally, my husband is a current NCAA Division I associate head coach, former head coach, and has worked in the industry for over twenty years. Thus, combined, we have a vast network of professionals working in NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics. To gain access to both sport supervisors and head coaches, I utilized my and my husband's personal professional network to obtain participants either directly or to connect with others in the profession. My experience in NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics has crossed the path with both revenue and non-revenue sports and has been at the same and different institutions from my husband. Contrastingly, my husband has always worked with one sport, a non-revenue generating sport, but has developed friendships with coaches of both revenue and non-revenue generating sports at various institutions. Thus, together, our professional network includes professionals working in various sports, at various institutions, and of various gender, racial, and ethnic background providing a broad spectrum of participants.

## **Data Collection**

Creswell and Poth (2018) state, "a hallmark of all good qualitative research is the report of multiple perspectives that range over the entire spectrum of perspectives" (p. 154). Thus, it was imperative for this study to capture the lived experiences of various sport supervisors and various head coaches to fully understand the role of the sport supervisor in NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics. This was attained by using multiple data collection methods to ascertain the lived experience of the sport supervisor. The data

collections utilized for this study included, conducting semi-structured interviews with multiple participants, both sport supervisors and head coaches, as well as collecting data from job descriptions.

Interviews are social interactions between two people in a conversational style (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Warren & Xavia Karner, 2015). Interviews in qualitative research allow a researcher to understand an experience from the interviewee's point of view, thus bringing meaning and understanding to their experience as their own and as it relates to others (Kvale, 1996). Further, semi-structured interviews provide a guide for the researcher while also allowing the researcher to glean additional insights by straying from the interview protocol when the conversation lends to such action. Thus, semi-structured interviews provided a framework to understand the lived experiences of sport supervisors while also providing flexibility to move away from structured questions as needed. For this study, both sport supervisors and head coaches were interviewed.

Before beginning the study, pilot studies with a sport supervisor and a head coach were conducted. Through this process, I was able to examine the flow and wording of my interview protocol (Appendix A) for clarity and thoroughness. The interview questions were developed from the literature on role theory and leader-member exchange theory and adapted for the role of sport supervisor and head coach, respectively. Interview questions for sport supervisors included questions to understand the role of the sport supervisor as well as questions to understand the relationship between the sport supervisor and the head coach. Interview questions included:

1. In your own words, describe for me the role of a sport supervisor.

2. In your experience, what behaviors/skills/attributes make an effective sport supervisor? (Harding et al., 2014)
3. What are the expectations of a sport supervisor? Who sets the expectations?
4. What tasks make up your role as a sport supervisor?
5. When you took your position as [insert participant's title], was sport supervision included in your formal job description? Follow-up, if no, how did sport supervision become a part of your role?
6. Do you feel a delineation of your role as a sport supervisor from your [participant's title]? (Graen & Scandura, 1987)
7. In one word, describe your relationship with the head coach(es) you supervise. (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995)
8. In your role as a sport supervisor, what are the most helpful behaviors a coach can display to build an effective relationship with you? (Dulebohn et al., 2012)
9. Do you consider you and your current head coach to have similar interests, values, and attitudes? (Dulebohn, 2012)

Interview questions for head coaches included questions to understand their perception of the role of the sport supervisor as well as questions to understand the relationship between the sport supervisor and the head coach. Interview questions included:

1. What word would you use to describe the role of sport supervisor? (Dansereau et al., 1975)
2. What skills, expertise, and knowledge do sport supervisors need to be an effective sport supervisor? (Hoye, 2006)

3. In one or two words, on what is your relationship with your sport supervisor based?  
(Grean & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Hoye, 2006)
4. Do you consider you and your sport supervisor to have similar interests, values, and attitudes? (Dulebohn et al., 2012)
5. How does your sport supervisor provide feedback to you? (Dulebohn et al., 2012)
6. Provide an example to me when your sport supervisor utilized their power to help you solve a problem for your program. (Dansereau et al., 1975)
7. Have you ever left a job because of a poor relationship with a sport supervisor?
8. Thinking about your current sport supervisor, describe for me your relationship with them. (Grean & Uhl-Bien, 1995)

In addition to the semi-structured interviews, I also collected job descriptions listed on various job posting sites including [naaa.org](http://naaa.org) and [d1ticker.com](http://d1ticker.com). In my search of job descriptions, I focused on positions that listed the title of assistant or associate athletic director and that had some indication of sport supervision as a duty listed. If there was no indication that the role would entail sport supervision it was not included. Additionally, I examined an informal sport supervisor manual that was built by a committee of women leaders in intercollegiate athletics and was supported by the formal organization, Women Leaders in College Sports.

### **Ethical Considerations**

As with all research studies it is imperative to ensure there was ethical grounding throughout the project. Thus, numerous ethical factors were considered throughout this study. First, permission to conduct a study on human subjects was obtained through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Louisville. Secondly, when contacting potential



research participants, each participant was provided with an overview of the study including the study's purpose, any potential conflicts, and a firm understanding that participating was optional.

Before conducting interviews, I considered my role in the study from multiple viewpoints, that as a former employee in NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics, as a spouse to a current NCAA Division I intercollegiate associate head coach and former head coach, and that as a friend or acquaintance to many participants through my years of working in NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics. As noted by Glesne (2016), researchers can assume different roles, including, exploiter, reformer, advocate, and friend all of which pose different ethical considerations. Considering that many of the participants I interviewed were either direct former colleagues or supervisors of mine or were introduced to me from a direct contact, there was a foundational level of trust that allowed the interview to be a natural conversation with openness. However, I also acknowledged that my personal relationship with certain participants provided me with potentially sensitive information that, as a researcher, I had to acknowledge and consider if it was appropriate and necessary to include in the study (Glesne, 2016). Overall, I approached the study with my participants as a professional colleague with an understanding for the industry but with a desire to hear their individual experiences.

Once participants agreed to participate, each participant was provided an informed consent. The informed consent reinforced to the participants (a) participation was voluntary, (b) acknowledgement of any potential risks for the participants in the study, and (c) participants were permitted to withdrawal from the study at any time. This information was provided to the participants in both written form (i.e., email) and verbally at the beginning of

each interview. Each interview was conducted in a private setting offering the participants a safe environment for open conversation. Additionally, all identifiers, including participant names and institutional names, were removed from the transcripts to ensure anonymity. Participants were given pseudonyms during all phases of data collection and analysis. All data collected was stored electronically on a password protected computer. No known risks to the participants were present in this study. Furthermore, the benefits, of gaining a comprehensive and empirically founded understanding of the role of the sport supervisor are directly beneficial to the participants as well as the field of intercollegiate athletics.

### **Data Analysis**

The data obtained through the interviews with participants and through the document analysis of the job descriptions was key during the data analysis process. However, as Creswell and Poth (2018) note, the data analysis process involves more than just analyzing transcripts and text, but in addition, includes organizing the data, conducting multiple read-throughs of the data, coding and developing themes, and interpreting the discovered codes and themes. Furthermore, the data analysis process is continuous and involves the researcher engaging in the “process of moving in analytic circles” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.185) revisiting several aspects of the data analysis process multiple times. In addition to the process being iterative in nature, there are also various forms of data analysis in qualitative research (Glesne, 2016). This study utilized thematic analysis to look for patterns and discover themes (Glesne, 2016). According to Glesne (2016), thematic analysis is appropriate when a researcher is examining “underlying complexities” (p.184) and seeking “to identify tensions and distinctions, and to explain where and why people differ from a general pattern” (p.184). Given this study’s purpose is to define and better understand the role of the sport

supervisor and explore the relationship between the sport supervisor and the head coach, using thematic analysis will guide the process of understanding this complex role in an equally complex organizational structure and the dyadic relationship of the sport supervisor and head coach. Furthermore, thematic analysis is common in phenomenology studies to separate various participant's meanings (Miles et al., 2020).

To begin the process of data analysis, the data must be organized. The organization of the data began during the data collection process to capture analytical connections as they were occurring (Glesne, 2016). Analytical memo writing was utilized to capture my reflective thoughts at various stages of the process. Formally, an analytical memo "is a brief or extended narrative that documents the researcher's reflections and thinking processes about the data" (Miles et al., 2020, p. 88). Glesne (2016) notes, "memo writing also frees your mind for new thoughts and perspectives" (p. 189). Thus, through analytical memo writing, I was able to capture thoughts as they occurred to make connections and to empty my thoughts and see new connections.

Following the process of thematic data analysis, data analysis also included managing the data. As interviews were conducted and transcribed, files were organized based on whether the interviewee was a sport supervisor or head coach. As interviews concluded and transcripts were available, I immersed myself in the transcripts, reading and re-reading them several times before breaking the interviews into separate parts for the coding process (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The coding process in data analysis is utilized for "describing, classifying, and interpreting the data" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 189). Saldaña (2016) defines a code as, "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing,

and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p. 4). While coding is not the only form of data analysis in qualitative research (Saldaña, 2016), it is an integral part of thematic data analysis. This study utilized both deductive and inductive coding. Deductive coding, also known as a prior coding, is the development of codes before data collection (Miles et al., 2020). Deductive codes are typically developed from the literature and can include key variables or factors relevant to the research. For example, the known factors influencing LMX relationships for both sport supervisors and head coaches was used to understand if the factors are present and relevant to participants in this dyad. Conversely, inductive codes emerged through the data analysis process (Miles et al., 2020). Inductive coding allows the researcher to be open to what the participants and data say (Miles et al., 2020). Therefore, by using both deductive and inductive coding, I interpreted the data to analyze alignment with current and past literature while also expanding the research with the emergence of new codes.

Two coding methods were utilized in this study to better understand a complex role and a dyadic relationship. The eclectic coding process was used as it allows for a repertoire of first cycle coding methods simultaneously allowing researchers to combine first cycle codes to better understand a phenomenon (Saldaña, 2016). Additionally, eclectic coding guides a researcher through “first drafts” of coding followed by “revised drafts” based on reflection of what the participant’s experiences are gleaned (Saldaña, 2016). This coding process was necessary to capture the complexity of the lived experience of sport supervisors in NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics as well as the relationship between the sport supervisor and the head coach. The first cycle coding methods used included, attribute and in vivo coding. Pattern coding was utilized as the second cycle coding method as it guided the

groupings of data discovered in first cycle coding into a “smaller number of categories, themes, or concepts” (Saldaña, 2016, p.236).

Attribute coding was utilized to provide context to the sample. Attribute coding, also known as descriptive coding or setting/context codes is the documentation of descriptive information about the participants (Saldaña, 2016). Attribute coding is a type of qualitative data management and is useful when examining multiple participants in interrelationships, such as sport supervisors and head coaches (Saldaña, 2016). I collected specific self-reported demographic information from each participant to better understand my sample. This data included the participant’s formal title, institution, years working in the intercollegiate athletics industry, years in current role, years served as a sport supervisor or head coach, gender, and race. Additionally, for sport supervisors, I captured the team(s) they are assigned to supervise.

In vivo coding was utilized to address RQ1, RQ2, RQ3 and RQ4. Research questions 1 and 2 focused on the perception of the role of sport supervisor by both the sport supervisor and the head coach, while RQ3 and 4 focused on the relationship between the sport supervisor and head coach. In vivo coding uses actual words and phrases from participants to explicate their lived experience (Saldaña, 2016). This was imperative to understand how sport supervisors and head coaches define the role of the sport supervisor based on their unique lived experiences, using their words. Thus, the role of sport supervisor is defined through those that are in the role and those that interact with the role directly. While in vivo coding focuses on the direct words or phrases from a participant, process coding allows researchers to show action in the data using gerunds (“-ing” words) (Charmaz, 2002; Saldaña, 2016). Process coding was used to examine the actions and routines of the role of

sport supervisor as well as to illustrate the state of trust between the sport supervisor and head coach. It is not recommended that in vivo coding or process coding are used as the sole coding methods (Saldaña, 2016); thus, both methods were used to capture both the lived experience and the action of the participants to better understand the role of the sport supervisor and the relationship between the sport supervisor and the head coach.

Emotion coding is useful when exploring, “intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions, especially in matters of social relationships, reasoning, decision-making, judgement, and risk-taking” (Saldaña, 2016, p.125). Emotion coding acknowledges the presence of emotions and guides the researcher in exploring the role of emotions in the participant’s lived experience. As Corbin and Strauss (2015) stated, “one can’t separate emotion from action; they flow together, one leading into the other” (p. 23). Thus, emotion coding was utilized for RQ1a, which focused on how sport supervisors negotiate their day-to-day tasks, and RQ3 and 4, which focused on the perceived role of the sport supervisor by both the sport supervisor and the head coach. It was necessary to capture the emotions of the sport supervisor to better understand how they negotiated their daily tasks (RQ1a) and to provide the emotional storyline of the role of the sport supervisor (RQ3 and 4) to life.

Versus coding was used in the coding of RQ1a as well as in examining the perceived differences by sport supervisors and head coaches through examination of RQ1 versus RQ2 and RQ3 versus RQ4. Versus coding is predicated on the existence of conflict between dichotomies of individuals, processes, or concepts, with a focus to reveal underlying issues (Saldaña, 2016). Thus, versus coding was appropriate for RQ1a to explicate the dichotomous role sport supervisors play as both athletic administrators to specific units as well as sport supervisors to specific team(s). This was illustrated through an analysis of the structured and

unstructured tasks they complete on a daily basis. In examining the perceptions of two unique, yet related groups, sport supervisors and head coaches, versus coding guided the analysis of the hierarchical and power dynamics that exist within the relationship.

While first cycle coding focuses on summarizing portions of data, second cycle code is the development of categories or themes (Saldaña, 2016). For this study, the second cycle coding process known as pattern coding was utilized to develop themes by combining the different codes discovered in the first cycle coding process. Pattern coding is the process of grouping summaries of data and developing them into smaller categories or themes (Saldaña, 2016). Through pattern coding, deeper meaning can be understood from the combining of first cycle codes, thus developing a richer understanding of the role of the sport supervisor.

By utilizing various first cycle coding methods and pattern coding as a second cycle method, a comprehensive definition for the role of the sport supervisor, that includes insights from both members of the dyad (sport supervisor and head coach) is found. Additionally, an understanding of what is required for a successful sport supervisor/head coach relationship is discovered. Furthermore, an understanding of areas of conflict within the relationship of sport supervisor/head coach are illuminated.

### **Trustworthiness**

A major component of qualitative studies is the trustworthiness or validation of the study. Glesne (2016) defines trustworthiness as “the alertness to the quality and rigor of a study, about what sorts of criteria can be used to assess how well the research was carried out” (p. 53). Multiple researchers, including Glesne (2016) and Creswell and Poth (2018) have identified validation strategies to contribute to the trustworthiness of the study. Creswell (2016) describes the strategies through three different lenses, the lens of the researcher, the

participant, and the reader. As a researcher, I utilized various strategies to enhance the trustworthiness of this study. This included the triangulation of multiple data sources to corroborate findings, rich thick descriptions, member checking, and researcher reflexivity (Glesne, 2016).

First, from a researcher's lens, this study collected data from multiple sources, including interviews of participants from different backgrounds and experiences as well as document collection of job descriptions. The inclusion of interviews of both sport supervisors and head coaches is also a form of triangulation as it includes the perspectives of people from different points of view on one role, the role of the sport supervisor (Patton, 1999).

Second, from a reader's lens, the use of rich, thick descriptions allows the reader to transfer the experience of the study to their experiences and situations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The various coding methods that capture not only the participant's words, but their actions and emotions provided detail to paint a strong visual of the role of the sport supervisor in NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics.

Third, from a participant's lens, member checking was utilized to engage with the participants as much as possible. Member checking was conducted by providing the participants with an executive summary of the findings with time allowed for the participants to provide feedback on the findings (Miles et al., 2020). Lincoln and Guba (1985) consider member checking to be "the most critical technique for establishing credibility" (p.314).

Last, researcher reflexivity was utilized to clarify any potential research bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Miles et al., 2020). Researcher reflexivity includes the researcher disclosing to the participants their potential biases established from their previous experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thus, I intently made sure every participant was aware



of my status as a former NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletic department employee as well as the wife of a NCAA Division I coach. Additionally, it was imperative that through the data analysis process that I bracketed my experiences working in intercollegiate athletics and examined all findings through an unbiased view. This included me thinking more conceptually, and not allowing my experiences or personal thoughts to guide the interpretation of the data (Miles et al., 2020).

### **Summary**

Current research on intercollegiate athletic departments has focused on athletic directors (Grappendorf & Lough, 2006; Taylor & Hardin, 2016; Welty Peachey & Burton, 2011; Whisenant et al., 2002), coaches (Kim & Andrew, 2015; Turner & Chelladurai, 2005), and student-athletes (Watson, 2005; Watt & Moore, 2001). However, the research on mid-level intercollegiate athletic administrators as a specific population within intercollegiate athletic departments is scarce (Hardin et al., 2013; Ott & Beamont, 2020). As middle managers, sport supervisors are integral members of the organization and are key to organizational success (Costanzo & Tzoumpa, 2008; Currie & Proctor, 2005; Dutton et al., 1997; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992). Therefore, it is imperative to better understand the role of the sport supervisor in NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics and the relationship between the sport supervisor and the head coach. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, this study gleaned valuable insights into the role of the sport supervisor and the relationship between the sport supervisor and head coach in NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics providing practical implications including a better understanding of role expectations, barriers, opportunities for support, and more efficient organizational structures. Additionally, an understanding of the role of the sport supervisor and the relationship

between the sport supervisor and the head coach will positively influence the experience of athletic administrators, coaches, and student-athletes. This study will also have theoretical implications as it will further expand role theory, LMX, and the middle management literature building on each with a population and a context that has not yet been examined.

## CHAPTER 4: PAPER ONE: “IS HE MY BOSS? I DON’T KNOW”: THE ROLE OF THE SPORT SUPERVISOR IN NCAA DIVISION I INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS

As head coaches of elite programs, Dabo Sweeney and Nick Saban are synonymous with National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I football. Yet, behind every team is an athletic administrator providing day-to-day support and guidance to the head coach and program. Typically, these athletic administrators hold titles such as assistant, associate, or deputy athletic director. Making up almost half (45%) of intercollegiate athletic department non-coaching personnel (Ott & Beaumont, 2020), athletic administrators link the administrative unit to other individual departments and athletic teams and are key organizational connectors vital to an organization’s success (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1997). As such, understanding the role of supporting athletic administrators is crucial to the success of athletic departments and the people and team therein.

When an administrator serves as a lead for a sports team, this role is identified as a sport supervisor. The role of sport supervisor is a designation given to athletic administrators by athletic directors; it implies a level of administrative leadership and oversight to the assigned team or teams. It is more common for mid-level athletic administrators to hold this role as an additional duty to the tasks associated with their formal titles (i.e., associate athletic director of marketing, etc.). As sport supervisors, these mid-level athletic administrators connect the administrative unit of the department with the individual team(s) they are assigned to lead (Ott & Beaumont, 2020).

Current research on intercollegiate athletic departments has focused on populations within intercollegiate athletic departments including, athletic directors (Grappendorf &

Lough, 2006; Taylor & Hardin, 2016; Welty Peachey & Burton, 2011; Whisenant et al., 2002), coaches (Kim & Andrew, 2015; Turner & Chelladurai, 2005), and students (Watson, 2005; Watt & Moore, 2001). Preliminary research has identified athletic administrators who serve as sport supervisors, as middle managers within the organizational structure of intercollegiate athletic departments (Ott & Beaumont, 2020); however, there is otherwise a dearth of research that focuses specifically on mid-level athletic administrators as a specific population within intercollegiate athletic departments (Hardin et al., 2013; Ott & Beaumont, 2020). Moreover, little is known or understood about the role of the sport supervisor or how individuals with this role may contribute to the success of a team or organization.

In contrast, middle managers in other industry sectors like business and higher education have been studied extensively and have been found to be integral to an organization's success (Costanzo & Tzoumpa, 2008; Currie & Proctor, 2005; Dutton et al., 1997; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992). Specifically, research has shown that middle managers influence multiple functions of organizations including, organizational strategy (Currie & Proctor, 2005; Van Rensburg et al., 2014), knowledge integration and transfer (Costanzo & Tzoumpa, 2008), emotional support (Huy, 2002), and idea generation (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1997; Dutton et al., 1997; Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990). Considering sport supervisors typically serve multiple middle-management roles in athletic departments, the purpose of this study is to define and better understand the role of the sport supervisor in intercollegiate athletics.

### **Defining Middle Managers**

Historically, research on management has failed to clearly define middle managers (Balogun & Johnson, 2004). For example, Uytterhoeven (1989) defined the middle manager

as, “a general manager who is responsible for a particular business unit at the intermediate level of the corporate hierarchy” (p.136). Mintzberg (1989) described middle managers as, “a hierarchy of authority between the operating core and the apex” (p. 98), while Dopson et al. (1996) stated middle managers are, “those below the small group of top strategic managers and above first-level supervision” (p.40). Huy (2002) provided more specificity by defining middle managers as, “people who are two levels below the CEO [chief executive officer] and one level above first-line supervisor” (p.38). In a 25-year review of middle management research, Wooldridge et al. (2008) noted, “the theoretical definition of middle management remains somewhat ambiguous...” (p. 1217). Still, one common and defining factor of middle managers has been their access to top management; however, top management has not always been consistently defined, thus, further complicating our understanding of the middle manager (Castañer & Yu, 2017).

Despite the existing confusion in the research on middle managers, Castañer and Yu (2017) recognize supervision over at least one employee as a distinguishable criterion of a manager from a non-manager position. Beyond the supervision criterion, Castañer and Yu (2017) argue that the definition of middle manager is dependent on the organizational perspective of the given issue, as well as the scope and structural complexity of the organization. Simply stated, supervising another employee is only one facet of middle management, other facets of middle management are more unique to the organization and issue. For example, when examining the decision-making process for a large organization with multiple levels, Castañer and Yu (2017) argue that the term ‘top management’ should be reserved for those individuals who have the power and authority to make the final decisions for the organization. However, it is possible that for a mid-sized or small organization with

fewer organizational levels, middle managers may also be final decision-makers. Thus, because each organization is unique, Castañer and Yu (2017) and Wooldridge et al. (2008) urge researchers to explicitly define middle managers within the context of the specific organization and the middle managers' position within the organization when studying middle managers. While this suggestion may decrease consistency across studies, by providing a definition in the context, this respects the uniqueness of an organization while providing specificity around a particular role.

The only known study on mid-level athletic administrators was conducted by Ott and Beaumont (2020). Ott and Beaumont (2020) utilized the functional concepts of middle management provided by previous scholars (e.g., Mills, 2000) to define mid-level administrators in intercollegiate athletics. They defined mid-level athletic administrators as, “mid-level” positions in intercollegiate athletics programs as all jobs, with the exception of the athletics director, that have: 1. Primary responsibilities for supporting and advancing the athletics department's operational and administrative enterprise; and 2. Supervisory responsibilities over individuals or programs within the institution's intercollegiate athletics department (p.90).

Furthermore, Ott and Beaumont (2020) identified two mid-level tiers distinguished by the level of separation between the mid-level administrator and the athletic director (See Table 1). For example, assistant athletic directors and directors are classified as mid-level tier II, while associate athletic directors, senior associate athletic directors, deputy athletic directors and c-level positions (e.g., chief financial officer, etc.) are classified as mid-level tier I positions (Ott & Beaumont, 2020). Since both mid-level tier I and tier II positions could

include the additional role of sport supervisor, for the purpose of this study, positions in both tier I and tier II will be considered mid-level athletic administrators.

**Table 1**

*Staff and Administrator Positions in Intercollegiate Athletics Programs*

Category	Sample Titles
Entry	Academic Advisor, Life Skills Coordinator, Compliance Coordinator, Social Media Specialist, Assistant Athletic Trainer, Assistant Director of Sports Information, Event Coordinator
Mid-Level Tier II	Assistant Director of Athletics, Head Equipment Manager, Business Manager, Manager of Ticket Sales, Director of Compliance, Director of Marketing & Promotions, Sports Information Director, Head Athletic Trainer
Mid-Level Tier I	Associate Director of Athletics, Senior Associate Director of Athletics, Chief Operating Officer, Chief Financial Officer, Senior Woman Administrator
Executive	Director of Athletics

*Note.* Most titles in the table are general and provided as examples. Programs often assign different official titles for the roles listed here. However, NCAA member schools are required to designate a Senior Woman Administrator and a Director of Athletics, for association- and conference-level governance roles. Adapted from “Defining and describing mid-level administrators in intercollegiate athletics,” by M. Ott and J. Beaumont, 2020, *New Directions for Higher Education*, 189, p. 91 (<https://doi.1002/he.20356>).

**Importance of Middle Managers in Organizations**

While it is important to understand what organizational titles constitute middle managers, it is equally important to understand the roles and tasks of those in the positions. Ironically, the same level of complexity that plagues defining middle managers is present in

understanding their roles and tasks. Middle managers have been described as, “being stuck between levels without agency” (Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020, p.146); “at once controller, controlled, resister and resisted” (Harding et al., 2014, p. 1231); and, as “linking pins who have upward, downward and lateral influence” (Van Rensburg et al., 2014, p. 167). Furthermore, the function of the middle manager is ambiguous, as researchers have examined what middle managers *should* do, what they *actually* do, and the *skills* required to be an effective middle manager (Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020; Harding et al., 2014).

Wooldridge and Floyd (1990) identify middle managers as strategic actors who play a pivotal role in the organization’s strategic initiatives. They argue middle managers play a substantial role in the strategic decision-making process beyond just implementation (Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990). While implementation of strategic initiatives should not be the only role of middle managers, they are vital to the effective implementation of agreed upon initiatives (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997).

Middle managers are also facilitators of learning and knowledge within an organization (Constanzo & Tzoumpa, 2008). Organizational learning includes the processes of knowledge acquisition and knowledge sharing (Constanzo & Tzoumpa, 2008). More specifically, knowledge acquisition is a creation process for new ideas, relationships, and thoughts, while knowledge sharing is the assimilation process of integrating the learning into new situations (Constanzo & Tzoumpa, 2008). As linking pins between vertical levels within an organization, middle managers, who have acquired knowledge, can facilitate the knowledge sharing process to increase the organization’s overall performance (Constanzo & Tzoumpa, 2008).



While vital to the organization, middle managers can also find themselves in challenging positions within the organizational structure or levels of organizations. When “being stuck between levels” (Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020, p.146), it is common for middle managers to experience contradictory expectations (Currie & Proctor, 2005). To employees in the organization, the middle manager is the supervisor or leader; to others, they are a subordinate or follower. Thus, it is not uncommon for middle managers to experience role conflict and role ambiguity as they balance the often-contradictory expectations of the employees above and below them (Currie & Proctor, 2005). For mid-level athletic administrators who are sport supervisors, they must balance expectations from the athletic director as well as those from the head coach of the respective programs they oversee. Or, said another way, they must balance the needs of the overall department with those of the individual program. Either way, this middle management position can pose challenges as sport supervisors balance various needs.

As integral members to the organization’s performance (Costanzo & Tzoumpa, 2008; Currie & Proctor, 2005; Dutton et al., 1997; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992), middle managers are also fraught with confusion and ambiguity often driven by a lack of clear expectations and understanding of their role (Currie & Proctor, 2005; Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020). Central to the understanding of social structures and human behavior in organizations, roles provide guidance for conceptualizing behaviors (Mead, 1934; Turner, 1978; Welbourne et al., 1998). Role theory, which focuses on patterned behaviors and shared expectations (Biddle, 1986), provides the framework to understand the role of the sport supervisor.

## **Role Theory**

Within social systems, roles are central to understanding the organization (Welbourne et al., 1998) and employee behavior within the organization (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Roles are repeated and patterned behaviors that can provide stability for organizations (Naylor et al., 1980). Role theory provides the framework for understanding why roles are needed, how roles are developed, and how roles exist within the relationships in an organization (Naylor et al., 1980). Biddle (1986) expanded on role theory with three main tenets:

- (d) “patterned and characteristic social behaviors,
- (e) parts or identities that are assumed by social participants (others), and
- (f) scripts or expectations for behavior that are understood by all and adhered to by performers” (Biddle, 1986, p.68).

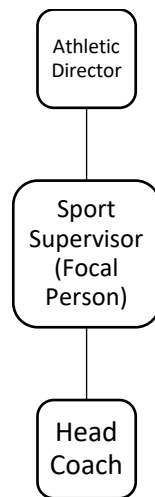
Thus, roles are formed by both behaviors and expectations where behaviors are defined as “overt activities of human beings, such as bodily motions, speech content and manner” (Biddle, 1979, p. 24) and expectations “connotes awareness, thus suggesting that persons are phenomenally alive and rational in their orientation to events” (Biddle, 1979, p. 116). Within the context of the role of the sport supervisors, behaviors could include their body language and communication style. While the expectations are the shared expectations between the sport supervisor and the head coach as to what behaviors both or either party expect.

Focusing on the social interaction of individuals within organizations in the context of role theory, Katz and Kahn (1966) introduced the role-episode construct to explicate how individuals work together to set expectations for a specific role. Within organizations, individuals with direct relationships with each other form role sets. The role set consists of the focal person, their subordinates, and other members whom they may work with closely.

For a sport supervisor, their role set would presumably consist of themselves as the focal person, the athletic director, and head coach of the sport they supervise (See Figure 1). The role-episode then is the interaction amongst those in the role set. Wickman and Parker (2006) define the role-episode as, “any interaction between employees whereby role-expectations and role-behaviors are manifest in measurable consequences” (p.443). Simply stated, the role-episode is the social interaction that occurs between individuals within a role set, where the individual behaviors of the focal person are derived from the expectations of the members of their role set. Only the perceptions of the sport supervisor and head coach will be examined in this study.

**Figure 1**

*Role Set for Sport Supervisor*



Roles are critical to understanding human behavior in organizations (Naylor et al., 1980). Unclear role expectations and perceptions can lead to numerous role stressors including, role ambiguity and role conflict. These stressors can lead to higher levels of job stress (House & Rizzo, 1972; Ivancevich & Donnelly, 1974; Orgambidez & Benítez, 2021; Richards et al., 2017; Rizzo, et al., 1970), lower levels of job satisfaction (Abramis, 1994;

Eys et al., 2003; House & Rizzo, 1972; Johnson & Stinson, 1975; Thakre & Shroff, 2016), propensity to leave the organization (House & Rizzo, 1972; Ivancevich & Donnelly, 1974; Johnson & Stinson, 1975; Rizzo, et al., 1970), job performance (Tubre & Collins, 2000), and organizational effectiveness (House & Rizzo, 1972; Ivancevich & Donnelly, 1974; Kahn et al., 1964; Orgambidez & Benítez, 2021).

Role theory provides a thorough and multi-faceted approach to understand the role of the sport supervisor which is currently not defined or well understood. Furthermore, it is important to understand the role stressors that sport supervisors may or may not experience as role ambiguity and role conflict have both been contributed negatively to organizational effectiveness (Orgambidez & Benítez, 2021; Rizzo et al., 1970). Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the behaviors and expectations of both sport supervisors and head coaches for the role of the sport supervisor in an effort to define and better understand the role of the sport supervisor.

### **Method**

As mid-level administrators, sport supervisors play a critical role linking the individual teams and units to the organization (Constanzo & Tzoumpa, 2008; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992). Thus, the role of the sport supervisor is integral to the organizational success of the entire intercollegiate athletic department. To bring an understanding to the role of the sport supervisor, this study used a qualitative research design to understand the perceived role of the sport supervisor in NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics. Specifically, this study utilized descriptive phenomenology to understand the essence of the role of the sport supervisor focusing on the experiences of those individuals who interact with the role and how they experience the role (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). While most studies on

role theory have utilized a quantitative approach (Chaudhry et al., 2021; Epitropaki & Martin, 2016; Gerstner & Day, 1997), a qualitative approach was appropriate for this study as it explored an unexamined phenomenon, the role of the sport supervisor through two members of the role set, the sport supervisor, and the head coach. Additionally, job postings for athletic administration jobs were analyzed to examine how sport supervision is discussed in such postings, if at all. Furthermore, qualitative research, especially the interpretative approach, recognizes that reality is a social construct that is derived by the individuals in the given context (Glesne, 2016). Thus, the perceptions of individuals are the reality. As noted by Ilgen and Hollenbeck (1992), through the eyes of a role theorist, roles are seen through shared experiences; thus, a qualitative approach fosters the understanding of the shared experiences of sport supervisors and head coaches to fully appreciate the role of a sport supervisor.

### **Participant Sample**

The population for this study was (a) NCAA Division athletic administrators who hold the role of sport supervisor and (b) NCAA Division I head coaches. Criterion and snowball sampling guided the selection process for participants in the study. Criterion sampling was used to guide the inclusion/exclusion criteria for the participants (Suri, 2011). Sport supervisors were identified as those with assigned supervisory responsibilities to a specific team or teams (e.g., football, women's soccer) within the athletic department. Sport supervisors were selected based on the following criteria, (a) athletic administrator from a NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletic department, and (b) formal designation of the role of sport supervisor for one or more sports as identified on the department staff directory or through the individual's on-line biography.

Consideration was also made to include sport supervisors of (a) both revenue (e.g., football) and non-revenue (e.g., men's soccer) sports, (b) male (e.g., men's basketball) and female (e.g., women's basketball) teams, and (c) male and female head coaches. Gathering perspectives from multiple sport supervisors with various personal backgrounds and different sport supervision responsibilities ensured that a spectrum of sport supervisor's experiences was considered and examined (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Head coaches were identified as those with the formal title of 'head coach' (e.g., men's basketball head coach) of a specific sport as identified on the department staff directory. Consideration was made to include head coaches of (a) both revenue (e.g., football) and non-revenue (e.g., men's soccer) sports, (b) male (e.g., men's basketball) and female (e.g., women's basketball) teams, and (c) male and female head coaches. In total 11 athletic administrators who hold the role of sport supervisor (Table 2) and 11 head coaches were interviewed for a total of 22 participants (Table 3).

### **Data Collection**

The data collection for this study included, conducting semi-structured interviews with multiple participants (i.e., sport supervisors and head coaches), and document analysis of job postings for athletic administrator positions.

A pilot study with a sport supervisor and a former head coach was conducted with minor changes to the interview protocol made based on their recommendations. The interview protocol was developed from the literature on role theory and adapted for the role of sport supervisor and head coach, respectively. Interview questions for sport supervisors included questions to understand the role of the sport supervisor. Interview questions included, (a) In your own words, describe for me the role of a sport supervisor, (b) In your

experience, what behaviors/skills/attributes make an effective sport supervisor? (Harding et al., 2014), (c) What are the expectations of a sport supervisor? Who sets the expectations?, (d) What tasks make-up your role as a sport supervisor?

Interview questions for head coaches included questions to understand their perception of the role of the sport supervisor. Interview questions included, (a) What word would you use to describe the role of sport supervisor? (Dansereau et al., 1975) and (b) What skills, expertise, and knowledge do sport supervisors need to be an effective sport supervisor? (Hoye, 2006). Each interview occurred via Zoom, a video conferencing service, and lasted between 40 minutes and 80 minutes.

**Table 2***Sport Supervisor Participants*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Job Function</b>	<b>Revenue/Non-Revenue Sport</b>
Sandy	Senior Associate AD	Internal Affairs	Non-Revenue
Peyton	Executive Senior Associate Athletics Director	External Affairs	Non-Revenue
Andrea	Deputy Athletics Director	Internal Affairs	Revenue & Priority
Virginia	Senior Associate AD	External Affairs	Non-Revenue
Rexton	Deputy Athletic Director	Internal & External Affairs	Non-Revenue
Sarah	Senior Associate Athletic Director	Internal Affairs	Non-Revenue
Linda	Deputy Athletic Director/SWA	Internal Affairs	Revenue & Non-Revenue
Sheldon	Chief Financial Officer	Finance	Non-Revenue
Ian	Deputy Director of Athletics and CFO	Finance	Non-Revenue
Paula	Chief of Staff/Sr. Associate Athletics Director	Internal Affairs	Tier 1 & 2
Marlon	Deputy Director of Athletics	Finance & External Affairs	Priority



**Table 3***Head Coach Participants*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Sport</b>	<b>Revenue/Non-Revenue</b>
Charlene	Women's Basketball	Revenue
David	Men's Soccer	Non-Revenue
William	Women's Soccer	Non-Revenue
Samantha	Women's Volleyball	Non-Revenue
Heather	Softball	Non-Revenue (Priority Sport)
Matt	Football	Revenue
Brad	Men's Soccer	Non-Revenue
Duncan	Rifle	Non-Revenue
Lamar	Men's Soccer	Non-Revenue
Sally	Field Hockey	Non-Revenue
Rachel	Women's Basketball	Revenue

All interviews were transcribed using Otter.ai, a transcription service and then reviewed by the lead researcher for clarity and correctness. Edits were made to the transcripts as necessary and then shared with participants for member-checking.

In addition to the semi-structured interviews, job descriptions listed on various job posting sites including ncaa.org and d1ticker.com were collected. The job postings focused on positions that listed the title of assistant or associate athletic director and that had some indication of sport supervision as a duty listed. If there was no indication that the role would entail sport supervision it was not included.

## **Data Analysis**

This study utilized thematic analysis in reviewing interview transcripts and job descriptions to look for patterns and discover themes (Glesne, 2016). According to Glesne (2016), thematic analysis is appropriate when a researcher is examining “underlying complexities” (p.184) and seeking “to identify tensions and distinctions, and to explain where and why people differ from a general pattern” (p.184). Given this study’s purpose was to understand the perceived role of the sport supervisor in NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics, thematic analysis guided the process of understanding this complex role in an equally complex organizational structure. Furthermore, thematic analysis is common in phenomenology studies to separate various participant’s meanings (Miles et al., 2020).

This study utilized inductive coding as the study was focused on exploring the role of the sport supervisor through the framework of role theory. Inductive codes emerge through the data analysis process, allowing the researcher to be open to what the participants and data say (Miles et al, 2020). Inductive coding allowed new themes to emerge as the role of the sport supervisor is better understood. The first cycle coding methods used attribute and in vivo coding. Pattern coding was utilized as the second cycle coding method as it guided the groupings of data discovered in first cycle coding into a “smaller number of categories, themes, or concepts” (Saldaña, 2016, p.236).

To increase the trustworthiness of the data, triangulation of multiple data sources to corroborate findings, rich thick descriptions, member checking, and researcher reflexivity were implemented (Glesne, 2016). Researcher reflexivity was utilized to clarify any potential research bias (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Miles et al., 2020). Both

researchers have previous work experience in NCAA Division I athletics. Additionally, the lead author is married to a NCAA Division I assistant coach. This information was shared with each participant for transparency. It was imperative that the researchers bracketed their experience working in intercollegiate athletics and examined all findings through an unbiased view. This included the researchers thinking more conceptually, and not allowing experiences or personal thoughts to guide the interpretation of the data (Miles et al., 2020).

### **Findings**

Little is known or understood about the role of the sport supervisor or how individuals with this role may contribute to the success of a team or organization. Research suggests middle management roles, like that of sport supervisor, serve as important connectors in an organization; are vital to knowledge transfer; strategic decision-making; and facilitation of new ideas, relationships, and thoughts (Constanzo & Tzoumpa, 2008; Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990). Role theory offers an interpretive framework to understand roles as determined by expectations and behaviors. An overview of expectations and behaviors for the role of the sport supervisor indicated by the participants follows.

#### **Expectations of the Sport Supervisor Role**

Biddle (1986) defines expectations as “scripts for behavior that are understood by all and adhered to by performers” (p.68). An understanding of perceptions on who and how expectations are currently set for the role of the sport supervisor is foundational to understanding the role of the sport supervisor. The findings from the data illustrate the

current inconsistency of who sets expectations and how expectations are shared as through the experiences of sport supervisors and head coaches.

In understanding how expectations are shared, some sport supervisors indicated they were given no guidance or set of expectations for the role. For example, Peyton noted, “So I didn't have a blueprint or even a one sheeter with hey, here are the things that are important to me as an AD that I see from us as a sport administrator, I just kind of figured it out.” Paula echoed this sentiment from her experience in the industry,

Let me just preface it by saying that one of the things that I think we don't do well in college athletics is, is explain what that [role of sport supervisor] is to people. But then I think we as an industry need to do a better job of explaining what it is that the expectations are about what to do as a sports supervisor, right.

On the other hand, some institutions have developed more formalized guidelines for their sport supervisors on the expectations for the role. Sheldon stated,

So for us, our chief sport administrator, we have like a two or three page description that we hammered out over the last year. And it talks a lot about like, what we should expect of ourselves as sport administrators...and it's like knowing practice times, knowing the academics, knowing all of the people that support the program, and making sure that they're engaged.”

Yet, other institutions lie somewhere in the middle, with loose guidelines. When asked how expectations are shared Ian stated, “there are a set of expectations and kind of guidelines that that are, that we established as a department and it was kind of written, not in a handbook, so to speak.” Virginia noted her institution is similar in that, “we've kind

of like, formalized like, what our expectations are, like, things that you should be doing, conversations you should be having. Kind of like rules.”

Similarly, the document analysis of the job descriptions matches the information gleaned from the interviews about expectations. Of the six job descriptions analyzed, only two contained some level of descriptive information about sport supervision, the remaining four simply stated sport oversight or supervision as a task for the position. Thus, there is inconsistency in how athletic departments are operationalizing the role of the sport supervisor and how the expectations for the role are set and shared.

When examining who sets the expectations for the sport supervisor, the findings were distinct between the two participant groups. Many of the sport supervisors ( $n = 6$ ) indicated that the expectations for their role as a sport supervisor were set by their athletic director. Only one sport supervisor acknowledged that their role as a sport supervisor receives expectations from the athletic director, head coach, and support staff. Thus, when examining the role set for the sport supervisor, which includes the athletic director and head coach as role senders and the sport supervisor as the focal person, sport supervisors only identify one role sender, the athletic director, as the individual setting expectations. However, as a member of the role set for a sport supervisor, head coaches are in fact setting expectations for sport supervisors. Without acknowledgement of the two role senders in the role set, the sport supervisor is destined to experience role ambiguity as they are only aware (at least consciously) of one role sender’s expectations.

When head coaches were asked who sets the expectations for the role of the sport supervisor, most participants ( $n = 8$ ) stated they did not know who sets the expectations. William stated, “in 30 years, I’ve never been given a set of expectations.”

Lamar echoed that sentiment, “eventually I think I need to probably have a conversation about clarity of the role, too. Because I've never have been provided that.” Role ambiguity exists for the head coaches as they do not have a formal understanding of the role of the supervisor, and thus, an understanding of the sport supervisor’s role set. As Lamar stated when referencing his sport supervisor, “Is he my boss? I don’t know.” Meanwhile, William states, “Because they're the boss, they can do whatever they want.” This confusion on the expectations for the sport supervisor causes role ambiguity for head coaches as they struggle to understand their role as it relates to their position as a head coach.

Even though there is ambiguity around who sets the expectations and how the expectations are shared, three shared expectation themes were identified by both participant groups, advocate, support, and evaluator.

***Advocate (Shared)***

Participants in both groups share the expectation for the sport supervisor to be an advocate. Both head coaches and sport supervisors spoke about the importance of the sport supervisor “being a voice” for the program. Rachel illustrated this,

Be a voice when I'm not in the room that's supporting what I'm doing, and illustrating what I'm doing in a positive way. And whether that's to other administrators, whether that's to a parent, whether that's a student athlete, whether that's to, you know, just my like coaching colleagues, I just want that to be a big thing.

Samantha noted,

So I expect them to be comfortable and trusting to take things to that like director that need to be taken. Basically, I just expect them to be like, always have our back and fight for what we need, even though I know we won't get it all the time, but I want to trust that they're actually doing the work to figure out, or bring it to the athletic director, not just saying no, or we can't do that, or this and that. So, I guess just an advocate, like a strong advocate. And they have to have some pretty good sales skills, I would say, in order to be a great advocate.

Head coaches recognize sport supervisors connect themselves and their programs to the athletic director and thus, expect them to be advocates for their program. Additionally, coaches have an understanding that they are not present in all decision-making processes but feel strongly that their sport supervisor should be advocating for their program when they are not present and are unable to do so themselves.

Similarly, most sport supervisors ( $n = 9$ ) agreed with the head coaches' expectations for sport supervisors to serve as an advocate for the program. Paula noted, "I guess, in a big way, being the program's advocate in everything, whether you're a priority [sport] or not." Sandy confirmed this idea stating, "I like to advocate for the program. Number one, without anyone telling me I need to like, inherently, I should know how to advocate for my program appropriately." Ian extended the definition of the program to include advocating for the student-athlete stating, "First and foremost, I'm kind of an advocate and a resource for the coaching staff and the student athletes." Recognizing the vastness of the program, Linda stated,

My philosophy is sports supervisor really acts as an advocate, not an agent, I hate to say like there's a difference, there's a fine line between those. So they're

advocating not only for the program, the student athletes, the coaches, the support staff, but also an advocate for the institution as well.

Head coaches and sport supervisors share the expectation that individuals serving in the role of a sport supervisor need to be advocates for the program they are supervising. Through the expectation of being an advocate, participants in both groups recognize the sport supervisor is a facilitator between the individual program(s) they are overseeing and the athletic department.

***Support (Shared)***

Sport supervisors and head coaches also identified support as an expectation for the role of the sport supervisor. While advocacy focuses on the support of a specific cause (i.e., a specific program or a specific issue or project), support is more general in nature and can be more relational and personal. All eleven head coaches recognized support as an expectation for the role of the sport supervisor while seven sport supervisors agreed.

As head coaches, both Rachel and Samantha shared that the sport supervisor should be someone who “has your back.” Duncan noted, “your sport admin, like, they, they need to be really supportive of, of what you're doing.” Heather agreed saying, “Support. I mean, I think generally, like you want them to be a fan of what you're doing.” Samantha continued by noting how lack of support can have both an emotional toll as well as a negative impact on coaches’ feelings of safety in advocating for their program. She shared,



When you have a bad one [sport supervisor], it just makes it really difficult to ask for anything and feel like you can [pause] you don't want to feel like an athlete can go to your sports supervisor and you're automatically in trouble.

In discussing the role of the sport supervisor, Lamar stated,

because I need that support, I need, you know, I need the support from the sport admin versus that pressure. Because I think that's important in this role is to have somebody that's there to kind of help you navigate a bunch of different situations not to judge you on your wins and losses.

Lamar's quote highlights an important distinction that is not clearly articulated, is the sport supervisor the evaluator or the supporter, or can they be both? Head coaches also recognized sport supervisors can show support to them by utilizing their department and institutional expertise, as well as their ability to guide them through situations. As David stated,

there are other logistical things that are involved with running the program that you don't always know who the right person is to go to, or what the right answer is with some of those things. So for them [sport supervisors] to be incredibly knowledgeable in the parts that I don't want to have to commit to memory.

Charlene agreed stating, "then also be there to help you navigate both your team, your program, the university, and athletics department. So, I think the role is there too. A lot of navigation, if that's fair."

Seven of the sport supervisors interviewed acknowledged their role as a sport supervisor was to support the program and the coach. Andrea stated,

I feel a sports supervisor is there to support and guide coaches. And what I mean by that is supporting is being there for them to come in and talk about different things that are going on not only with the student athletes, but with budgeting with scheduling with plans for future you know, even with recruiting, like I'm not in involved in the recruiting. But if they come in and say, you know what I'm really thinking about going in this direction for recruiting, what do you think? So really as a support to, you know, make sure that we're giving them all the tools they need and all the resources they need to be successful.

Sarah shared a similar sentiment,

And they're [head coaches] not really coming to me necessarily for approval on things, just more so support of what they decided to do. So, I really feel like my role is for a supervisor is to support the decisions that they make. And to support the student athletes.

Both head coaches and sport supervisors expect sport supervisors to provide support to head coaches as part of their role as a sport supervisor. Whether it is emotional support, departmental support, or to act as a sounding board to head coaches, participants in both groups recognize support from the sport supervisor is imperative.

### ***Evaluator (Shared)***

The third expectation shared by sport supervisors and head coaches was the theme of evaluator. Eight head coaches and ten sport supervisors identified the role of the sport supervisor to include oversight or evaluation. When asked to describe the role of the sport supervisor, William, a 30-year veteran head coach, noted, "Sport supervisor, it should be there I think for oversight of you know, some of the logistical things, recruiting,

scheduling, who we're making offers to, those type of things." Similarly, Brad stated that the role of the sport supervisor is, "someone who oversees the operations of my team and of my program." Rachel agreed stating, "and I just think it is somebody that monitors your sport, your progress...somebody that kind of directly oversees me." In addition to discussing program oversight, five head coaches directly used the term "boss" when describing their sport supervisor.

Sport supervisors provided a more thorough and extensive description of evaluation. Sport supervisors illustrated that in their role they are constantly evaluating the program. For example, Andrea described how joining teams on road trips is a form of evaluation,

I think that's why you take trip, that's why it's important that you do if you're able to take trips and go with the team. So you can really see that, because there's some, you know, I've gone to coach and been like that was the most unorganized trip I've been on. Like, why didn't I get an itinerary? Why did it change? Why didn't nobody tell me the time that the bus was meeting? You know, stuff like that.

Andrea, Marlon, Sheldon and Paula also noted that part of their role is to evaluate the entire program during competitions, including bench decorum as well as the student-athlete and coaches' behavior. Andrea said,

I'm also looking at our team, if we're down, you know, okay, let's see what how we're coming. What does the team look like when they get back on the court? Are they frazzled? Are they really relaxed? Are they too relaxed? Are they too high? I mean, you know, what does that look like? So that's what people are like, oh, it's

so fun to watch athletic events. I'm like, when we played [opposing team], I could not tell you any of the points and how we won.

Sheldon described his attendance of a post-game meeting after a tough loss,

I'm there to hear the way that everyone's interacting, you know, like how are our coaches interacting with one another. And how are the student-athletes taking the feedback. I mean, I want to see the sentiment of our softball team because I have colleagues right that need to make informed decisions and understand what we're doing

Paula described her observation of an assistant coach with “pretty volatile in-game tactics” and the response of the student-athletes to the behavior, sharing she addressed her observations with the head coach, but ultimately it was up to the head coach as to how they wanted to address it. Marlon discussed it as “providing feedback and constructive criticism and observations so that they can be better.” He further noted that sometimes coaches are “too close” and as a sport supervisor he can help them see “things they can't see.” Ian summed it up stating,

I think that the sport supervisor plays, and that I play is, you know, the overall evaluation of the program. Where is the program headed? How is the program doing? You know, are we being successful in what we're trying to do? What's the mission of the program? And are we being successful?

While head coaches and sport supervisors acknowledge there is an evaluative component with the role of the sport supervisor, the level and type of evaluation to which each group identifies and describes the evaluative component is distinctively different. This is an

area for future exploration as there is some apparent disconnect as to the level of evaluation the sport supervisor should and does apply to the head coach.

In addition to the three common expectations identified by both sport supervisors and head coaches, advocate, support, and evaluator, each group also identified two additional expectations. Partner and knowledge of sport were identified by head coaches as expectations and middle manager and professional necessity were shared by the sport supervisor participants as expectations for the role.

### ***Partner (Head Coaches)***

All eleven head coaches shared expectations of the sport supervisor being a partner to them and the program. The coaches described being a partner through the terms, “sounding board” or a “coach for me.” David described it saying, “So I'd like to think that you can get to a point with an administrator where they can be a sounding board if you need them to be and you can vent about certain things.” Charlene noted that being a head coach can be lonely, “because it's like, you want to be able to talk about some things, but you can't” and how the sport supervisor can really be that person a head coach can lean on as a partner, “I had to tell her [sport supervisor] like, Well, you're in that circle [circle of trust]...But it's she definitely is in the circle, for a reason, but as I told her, I was like, It's not my fault, you earned your way right in there.” Rachel noted that she looks to her sport supervisor for help with tasks outside her area of expertise stating, “And then I think also just being a sounding board, if there's, you know, there's certain things that come up that are non-coaching things.” Speaking in terms of what he would like to see in a sport supervisor, Lamar shared,

it would be a person I could go to with any issues that are within the program and seeking advice and support to navigate the certain situation. Yes. 100%. Okay, that's a fair word [partner] to use, that would be a great word.

Duncan shared how he sees his sport supervisor as his “first phone call” to facilitate any ideas that he and his staff may develop.

They were always [name omitted] involved in that conversation, and kind of helping me create whatever, whether we wanted to do a new fundraising event, or help an athlete or deal with like an incident or kick a team or kick a kid off the team or take away their scholarship or all kinds of things.

As Charlene stated, being a head coach can be lonely, therefore, head coaches look to their sport supervisors to be their partner, to be that person they can bounce administrative ideas off, the person they can get opinions from, this is an important expectation for individuals in the role of a sport supervisor.

### ***Knowledge of Sport (Head Coaches)***

Nine of the eleven head coaches shared a desire for their sport supervisor to have knowledge of their sport. Knowledge of sport is defined as, general knowledge about the game (e.g., how the game is scored), understanding trends within the game (e.g., recruiting, governance or rule changes), knowing the competition (e.g., who are the national powers). Knowledge of sport should not be confused with knowing tactics of a sport. This theme was shared through various scenarios from the participants. Lamar shared,

I feel like they should have a good sense of the sport itself that they're overseeing because I think for instance, with us is I just think you have to understand the

game a little bit to understand that you may not get a result, but you can play well still. And that's okay sometimes. And so, I think that helps in terms of them over overseeing.

William, another soccer head coach, echoed this sentiment while also elucidating that sport supervisors need to be able to discern that each sport is unique. He shared,

And like you say, knowledge of the sport. No, but like, discerning that sports are a little bit different. Soccer is different than basketball. Which is different than baseball, which is different than across country, you know... I think with soccer, because sometimes people don't, if they're not soccer people, totally understand how you can outshoot somebody 30 to one. Nobody understands that.

Interestingly, each soccer coach interview ( $n = 4$ ) addressed the need for a sport supervisor to have knowledge of the game. Brad shared this from the perspective of recruiting as well,

Like she understands now that; she said to me probably a month ago that I understand that the international recruiting starts now. Whereas before, I don't think they; they would be upset that I signed a player in April. And now she knows that like it's still going on. So, I was very appreciative and honestly surprised that she kind of knew that. But it was, it was very comforting.

Outside of soccer, Rachel shared that she expects her sport supervisor to have knowledge of her sport (women's basketball) and the recruiting cycles of it,

Yeah, I do. I think they need to be aware of like recruiting trends, they need to be aware of the culture; transfer portals are really big thing for us. So, you know, for kids leaving a program may have been a lot of red flags, you know, four years

ago. Now, it is par for the course. And if you don't know that, you're thinking there's an issue, and there's really not. And so, I think they need to be aware of that. I think they need to be aware of like, you know, we have the shutdown [no contact period] next week, and somebody scheduled a meeting. And I was like, No, why would you ever do that? Like, yeah, you know, you guys get mad when we call you after five. And you're calling us the one week of the year that we can turn off our phone. So, I think all of those things are just, you know, yeah, that they may need to be aware of.

Head coaches expect sport supervisors to discern that each sport is unique and, therefore, has unique attributes. In showing this recognition of differences and nuances specific to the sport(s) they are supervising, sport supervisors can show a high level of support to their coaches and student-athletes.

Continuing an exploration of the different expectations identified by sport supervisors and head coaches, the next section discusses the two themes, middle manager and professional necessity, identified by only sport supervisors

### ***Middle Manger (Sport Supervisors)***

While head coaches may be lonely, sport supervisors are stuck in the middle. Nine of the eleven sport supervisors acknowledged that in their role as a sport supervisor, they are middle managers. Sheldon stated, "I call it a point guard, but it probably officially is a middleman." Virginia gave an example in regards to decision making noting, "I'm just merely that extension. He [athletic director] has to approve it." Paula expanded on how the lack of authority in her role makes it difficult to lead stating, "It makes it hard, in my opinion makes it hard to lead when you can't, when you don't feel



like you have all the final decisions.” Marlon admitted to feeling “like a person in the middle” but acknowledged that,

Once you know the role, and you accept that you’re in the middle, and the job of the AD is to try and be as positive and encouraging and supportive of the coaches, but you have to be his or her eyes and ears and nose to the ground so to speak, that you end up just understanding that that’s the role and you accept it.

Linda shared an example of how as the middle person she acts as a mediator between coaches and support staff,

A lot of times, you'll have department heads or whoever's working with that sport, they might approach the sport supervisor, not go to the head coach, come to the sport supervisor and say, hey, I'm having this issue or, hey, [sport], asked for this or hey, [sport] used to stand out on the floor for the Alma Mater after the game and now they don't, can you ask them to do this? I said, okay, well walk me through, why, so I can have the conversation with coach and find out why they no longer stand on the floor. But I need to understand from your perspective why it's important.

As described by the participants, sport supervisors find themselves sandwiched in the middle; sandwiched between the head coach and the athletic director and sandwiched between the head coach and support staff. The challenges this poses for those in the role are discussed further in the discussion.

### ***Professional Necessity (Sport Supervisors)***

The final theme identified by sport supervisors is the theme of professional necessity. When discussing the role of the sport supervisor as a collegiate athletic

administrator, eight of the eleven participants alluded that sport supervision is a necessary next step for career progression within intercollegiate athletics. Paula shared, “Because I think especially in the last, say, decade, I think career matriculation equals sport supervision.” Linda echoed this sharing, “I asked for it. I asked to oversee a sport back when I initially got women's tennis...for my career development. I felt like I was ready for that next step.” Specifically, Virginia, Marlon, Linda, Sheldon, and Ian discussed how sport supervision is a requirement if an athletic administrator has aspirations to be an athletic director. Virginia shares,

It's [sport supervision] definitely a resume builder, because it would be very hard, I think, especially now, but always, for you to be an athletic director without having connectivity to the student athletes. And, also understanding what our coaches are dealing with on a daily basis, situations, issues that may arise, how you respond, and then the priority of the student athlete experience, and coaches.

Marlon provided an interesting perspective recognizing that “coming into intercollegiate athletics, I didn't know what the role was. But in talking to others, I knew that it was important to become an AD.” His statement reiterates the importance of the position for those looking to become athletic directors, but also the lack of understanding around the role.

Linda and Sheldon also shared that through their experiences, there is a notion within the industry to become an athletic director you must supervise either men’s basketball or football. As Linda shared her experience as a female athletic administrator with aspirations to be an athletic director,

...if as a female, they are scrutinized if they do not have experience with football, or men's basketball, in the ability to oversee an athletic department, even though their male counterparts may not also have experience overseeing football, men's basketball. So there, I see a huge push with friends and other institutions where they're trying to "strengthen their resume" by gaining sports supervision over a revenue sport, because even some athletic director job descriptions will distinctly say experience with overseeing revenue sports.

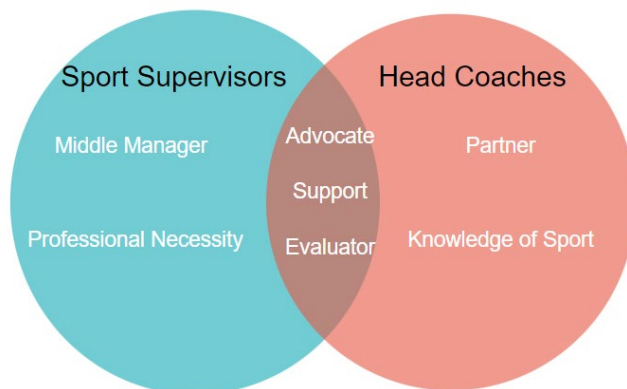
Sheldon shared his perspective on the necessity to supervise revenue generating sports versus having exposure to different circumstances and issues that sport supervisors face, everyone would be like, well, you know, if you want to be an AD, you have to supervise football, basketball, right? Like, I mean, I get it, I get why people want that. I understand it. I also think that if you actually just supervise a couple of relevant sports and did things, you had some winners, you had some losers, you had some firings and some hirings and figured it out, you're a heck of a lot more prepared than if you like worked for a coach that won for 10 years, right? And it just happened to be one of those revenue generating sports, but I'm sure people will disagree with me on that. That's just my take.

The participants' insights illustrate that sport supervision is considered a professional development for athletic administrators in intercollegiate athletics as a way to increase their responsibilities and skill set. In addition, it is a known requirement for becoming an athletic director. Thus, for many, sport supervision is a professional necessity.

In discussing the expectations for individuals in the role of the sport supervisor, sport supervisors and head coaches share three common themes, advocate, support, and evaluator. Each participant group also separately identified two additional expectations. For sport supervisors, additional themes were middle manager and professional necessity, while head coaches identified partner and knowledge of sport as expectations for their sport supervisor. Figure 2 provides an illustration of the expectations findings. Furthermore, the findings on expectations illuminated the lack of consistency with how expectations for the role of the sport supervisor are shared by both parties. With an understanding of the expectations as elucidated by both participant groups, an examination of the behaviors is needed to further understand how individuals in the role meet the expectations with their behaviors.

**Figure 2**

*Expectations of the Role of the Sport Supervisor*



**Behaviors of the Sport Supervisor Role**

Expectations alone do not define a role; desired behaviors must also be examined to fully understand a role and to understand how role senders perceive the expectations to be met through the behaviors of the focal person (Biddle, 1986; Naylor et al., 1980).

Behaviors support the expectations providing a comprehensive illustration of the role of the sport supervisor. In other words, the actions (behaviors) of individuals and how they interact with others, in part, set the expectations for the role. Both participant groups identified numerous behavioral skills, including displaying empathy, communicating, being a good listener, and being able to ask good questions. When considering these behaviors in aggregate, these skills are identified as emotional intelligence. Therefore, the singular overarching behavioral theme identified by coaches and sport supervisors was emotional intelligence. One additional behavioral theme was revealed from the head coaches, the theme of being present.

### **Emotional Intelligence**

Emotional intelligence is defined as, “the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others and for managing emotions well in ourselves AND in our relationships” (Goleman, 1998, p. 317). Linda captured the essence of why emotional intelligence is vital to the role of a sport supervisor stating,

This is a people business, and you have to effectively understand how to work with people, not deal with them, but work with them, and you're going to be working with not everyone you work with you, you're gonna like on a personal level, but you have to effectively work with them, or you are not going to be in that job. So, I think that's one of those things is just understanding how to how to work with different personalities, how sometimes it's working with difficult people, sometimes it's working with people who you love, and they just aren't getting the job done.

Rexton echoed the sentiment stating,

You have to have patience and understanding and empathy. Because coaching is an emotional business. And you can't be overly emotional and deal with it as a supervisor. Because college athletics, especially those sports that we talked about, football, men's basketball, women's basketball, they can become very emotional very quickly. And you've got to be able to be a calming influence as a sport administrator.

Several sport supervisors noted the importance of effective listening skills and as Andrea noted, a sport supervisor needs to “listen to hear not listen to respond.” Many of the head coaches concurred with sport supervisors needing to be good listeners. David stated, “I like to think that they were a good listener, that there was, there [were] very few things that I could come to them with that they would simply disregard, that they wouldn't at least take on board.” Coaches also recognized that good sport supervisors ask open-ended questions. Charlene described how her current sport supervisor utilized the skills of listening and asking open-ended questions to help her reach her own conclusions. She shared,

you already have your mind made up and you're like, and she's like, okay, let's, let's talk all the way through, tell me everything you're thinking. And then I'll start talking about like, damn like this, okay, I'm exaggerating, or like, you know, that I'm, like, off base with this or whatever.

Charlene's quote exemplifies how the behavior of being an active listener and asking good questions (demonstrating high emotional intelligence) makes the coach feel like their sport supervisor is their partner (an expectation).

### ***Being Present (Head Coaches)***

Head coaches noted that when sport supervisors are present, they feel supported. Ten head coaches identified being present as an important behavior a sport supervisor can display. Being present includes being physically present on a consistent basis and accessible. Rachel described this behavior stating,

I think another way is just being visible, whether it's, you know, in practices, at maybe events that we're doing at games and showing that you are completely invested in our team and in our, you know, just what it is that we are doing.

Sally described how her sport supervisor being present shows her that her program is supported, “like seeing her at our games or like seeing her interact with our players, I think that really shows that she like supports our program.”

Lamar conversely noted that he goes weeks without speaking to his sport supervisor and how he has a desire for them to be more present. He stated, “Yeah. For me, I would want them around our program a lot more, like know exactly what's going on. Not just pop in every once in a while, and kind of gauge the feel of the program based on maybe a given day.” Lamar noted the lack of presence by the sport supervisor makes the time when he does come around feel more evaluative than supportive,

If that if they're around, they're seeing the program constantly what's going on in that world, then I think it would work a little bit better, because now the evaluation is seeing more of the good, too...Like the buzzword is always culture.

What does culture look like? You only know culture if you're in it.”

Sport supervisors can also be a stronger advocate for the program when they are visible and present. Samantha illustrated this by stating,

Because I think that they need to know how hard we're working and how hard we're functioning. And they need to understand what we do. So when they go to bat for us that they have some ground to stand on. If they haven't seen us working or seen our interaction, and especially if things get rough, you know, like, it's easy for me to say last year, my first year with my sport administrator, because we had a great season, but when things are going rough, have they been around to witness what we're dealing with in our interaction? So, I think they, like I said they need to have a presence, so they understand what's going on.

Being present is also defined by head coaches as being accessible. Heather stated, “her accessibility is what makes her a great supervisor. I think that how she's able to respond and be available for us is absolutely something that I value.” Sally shared that her sport supervisor is always available, “I think she's very good about like, making sure the head coaches get, like her attention... if I call her, she will answer. I don't think I've ever called her and she has not answered.” Head coaches desire sport supervisors who are visible and accessible. Through these behaviors, head coaches feel supported, are more confident in their sport supervisor being a strong advocate for the program, and view them as a partner, all of which are expectations head coaches have for sport supervisors.

In analysis of the behaviors of the role of the sport supervisor, one overarching behavioral theme was indicated by participants from both groups, while head coaches indicated one additional behavioral theme. The behavioral themes focused on *how* (e.g., communication style, interpersonal skills) individuals in the role of sport supervisor engage with the role (Biddle, 1979). Emotional intelligence was the behavior indicated by

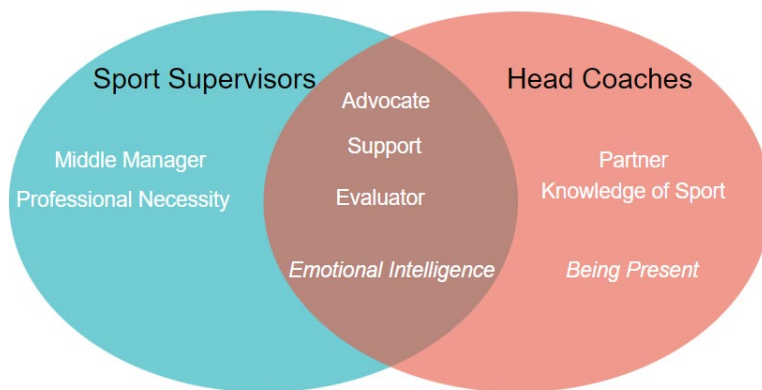


participants in both groups. Head coaches identified being present as a pivotal behavior for sport supervisors to display.

Figure 3 illustrates the expectation and behavior themes found from each participant group.

**Figure 3**

*Behaviors & Expectations of the Role of the Sport Supervisor*



*Note.* Behaviors are indicated in *Italic*.

## **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to define and better understand the role of the sport supervisor in intercollegiate athletics. Understanding the roles of the people within an organizational structure is imperative to the effectiveness of the organization (Cameron et al., 2011; Katz & Kahn, 1978). Roles are defined by the repeated and patterned behavior of individuals (Naylor et al., 1980) and the “expectations for behavior are understood by all and adhered to by performers” (Biddle, 1986, p.68). The findings show both similarities and differences in the expectations and the behaviors identified by both groups when describing the role of the sport supervisor. The role of sport supervisor as an

integral role within the organizational structure of intercollegiate athletic departments. Furthermore, the findings from this study illuminate the complexity of the role of the sport supervisor as well as the lack of clarity around what the role is, who sets the expectations, and how the expectations of the role are shared. Thus, the role of sport supervisor, while important, is both conflicted and ambiguous.

Sport supervisors and head coaches find themselves without a proper definition of the role, an understanding of what constitutes success in their role, and without guidance on how to execute the role. The result could lead to negative outcomes for the sport supervisor, their assigned team(s), and the department. While sport supervisors and head coaches shared three expectations, advocate, support and evaluator, head coaches shared two additional expectations that were not recognized by sport supervisors, partner and knowledge of sport. Thus, through interviews with members of the sport supervisor role set, sport supervisors and head coaches, this study has highlighted the role ambiguity that exists for the role of the sport supervisor. In other words, there is a disconnect between the expectations of the focal person (the sport supervisor) and the role sender (the head coach). This disconnect underscores the ambiguity in the role as sport supervisors are unaware of the expectations the coaches have of them to be their partner and to have knowledge of their sport. Previous research has noted that when individuals have unknown expectations, they can experience role ambiguity which can lead to decreased individual satisfaction and organizational effectiveness (Tubre & Collins, 2000; Welbourne et al., 1998). Therefore, it is imperative sport supervisors have individual conversations with their head coaches recognizing that sport supervision is a role that requires sport supervisors to utilize their emotional intelligence, namely social awareness,

to develop shared expectations for the role with the coach(es) they supervise. Developing shared expectations also facilitates a stronger relationship between the sport supervisor and head coach. If athletic administrators do not provide clarity around the role, it is probable that head coaches will assert their own expectations on the role, thus creating even more confusion and potentially more expectations for sport supervisors.

Athletic departments need to intentionally define the role of the sport supervisor, including insights from coaches, and openly discuss the role with all athletic department staff members. Based on the findings from this study, the following definition of sport supervisor is recommended:

*The “sport supervisor” in NCAA Division I athletics is a role held by athletic administrators whose function is to be a partner with the head coach by providing support, advocacy, and evaluation of the program(s) they supervise.*

Furthermore, to be effective in their role as a sport supervisor, athletic administrators need a high level of emotional intelligence and most importantly, need to be present with the programs they are supervising.

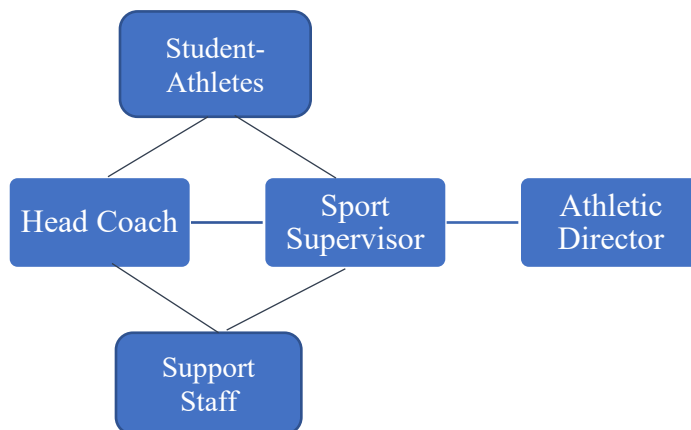
Because sport supervisors often have a dual administrative role in another area (e.g., marketing, academic services, compliance) in the athletic department, role conflict is almost inherent in the role of the sport supervisor. Specifically, the behavior of being present (e.g., visible and accessible) is one which head coaches strongly desire, but is not often recognized by sport supervisors. This poses the question, is the lack of visibility and accessibility by sport supervisors a lack of awareness or a lack of time? In the case of a lack of awareness, this would indicate the individual in the role is unaware of this expectation or potentially is lacking in emotional intelligence, seemingly social

awareness and relationship management. On the other hand, lack of visibility is due to lack of time, is this because the athletic administrators are juggling the demands of their job while also trying to balance the role of sport supervisor? While sport supervisors stated they enjoyed having additional responsibilities (e.g., chief financial officer) as it helped them understand the department from a boarder perspective, they should limit the number of sports they supervise to ensure they can meet head coaches' expectations of being present.

This study has also elucidated the role of the sport supervisor as a middle manager connecting the athletic department with the individual team(s) they oversee. While the initial role set of the sport supervisor was defined as sport supervisor, head coach, and athletic director, the findings of this study suggest it is multi-dimensional. The role set of the sport supervisor includes, at minimum, the sport supervisor, the head coach, the athletic director, the support staff, and the student-athletes (Figure 4).

**Figure 4**

*Updated Role Set of NCAA Division I Sport Supervisor*



Therefore, this study confirms that individuals serving in the role as a sport supervisor are in fact middle managers and face the many challenges associated with middle management (Currie & Proctor, 2005, Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020, Harding et al., 2014). Similar to past research on middle managers which has noted that middle management is ambiguous (Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020; Harding et al., 2014), the role of the sport supervisor is ambiguous as there is a disconnect between what they *should* do and what they *actually* do (Gjerde & Alvesson, 2020) and how those expectations and behaviors are shared. Head coaches acknowledged they do not know what the role of the sport supervisor is, and sport supervisors revealed they do not share expectations with their head coaches. Additionally, sport supervisors stated head coaches do not know how to utilize them; creating another sense of ambiguity as sport supervisors could feel underutilized and disconnected. Additionally, if head coaches do not know how to utilize their sport supervisor, this missed opportunity for advocacy and support of their program could impact how a coach feels supported by the administration. Adding yet another challenge, sport supervisors also face the charge of balancing departmental needs with those of the individual team(s) they supervise, along with advocating for the sport at the departmental, institutional, conference and national level.

Furthermore, through the findings of this study, it is evident that the role of the sport supervisor is a relationship-centric role. To be successful in this role, athletic administrators must recognize the importance of the relationship with the head coach and lead as a partner. Similarly, coaches should be transparent with their sport supervisors to build the trust and form an effective partnership.

## **Limitations and Areas for Future Research**

With limited research on middle managers in intercollegiate athletics and especially those athletic administrators who hold the role of sport supervisor, there are numerous opportunities for future research. First and foremost, a deeper understanding of the relationship between the sport supervisor and the coach(es) they supervise would help deepen the partnership aspect of the relationship identified by head coaches. Secondly, this study took a more generalizable approach in interviewing sport supervisors and head coaches not in shared dyads. Based on the findings from this study that illuminate the inconsistency in the role across institutions, it is suggested that future research examine sport supervisor/head coach dyads within one institution. Additionally, with the discovery of the multi-dimensional role set for sport supervisors, it would be beneficial to understand the role from the perspective of athletic directors, support staff, and student-athletes. An examination of the role from a group-level analysis could provide a more thorough understanding of the impact of the relationships on team performance and organizational effectiveness (Manata, 2020).

The findings of this study are limited to the experiences of the sport supervisors and head coaches examined in this study and cannot be generalized to all sport supervisors or head coaches. Every sport supervisor and head coach's experience are unique to their past and current situations, thus impacting their perception of the role. Furthermore, every institution has its own unique organizational structure and culture which impacts the role of the sport supervisor. Nevertheless, triangulation of the data aids in the transferability and trustworthiness of this study; suggesting that when other sport

administrators and/or head coaches read this study, they are likely to relate to some, if not many, of the experiences shared in the findings.

CHAPTER 5: PAPER TWO: RELATIONAL LEADERSHIP: AN EXAMINATION OF  
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SPORT SUPERVISOR AND THE HEAD  
COACH IN NCAA DIVISION I ATHLETICS

Numerous relationships exist within the context of sport: coach/athlete (Case, 1998; Caliskan, 2015; Cranmer, 2016; Cranmer & Myers, 2015), head coach/assistant coach (Sagas & Cunningham, 2004), administrator/staff relationship (Kent & Chelladurai, 2001), and board chairs and volunteer board members (Bang, 2011, 2013; Hoye, 2004, 2006). Research has shown the quality of the relationship between two individuals, known as a dyad, can influence multiple factors for the pair including job satisfaction, job performance, and organizational commitment (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Epitropaki & Martin, 2016; Gerstner & Day, 1997). College athletic departments model several of these relationships, but also one that is unique -- the sport supervisor and the head coach.

The role of sport supervisor is a designation given to intercollegiate athletic administrators by athletic directors; it implies a level of administrative leadership and oversight to the assigned sport team or teams. "Sport supervisor" is a role that often accompanies other administrative titles (i.e., assistant, associate, and deputy athletic directors) and responsibilities. Thus, sport supervisors are often considered mid-level athletic personnel that connect the administrative unit of the department with the individual sport team(s) they are assigned to lead (Ott & Beaumont, 2020). Prior research suggests that mid-level administrators serve as key organizational connectors vital to an



organization's success (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1997). In the athletic department, sport supervisors may be key to the overall department's success but may also play a role in facilitating the success of the team(s) for which they provide oversight. By virtue of being an organizational link between the administrative unit and the individual teams, sport supervisors inherently form a dyadic relationship with the head coaches they supervise, as well as the athletic director to whom they report. Still, little is known about the sport supervisor/head coach relationship.

Leader-member exchange (LMX) theory provides a framework to understand the relationship, not just the interaction, between the leader/supervisor and the member/follower. This study examines the relationship of the sport supervisor (leader) and the head coach (follower). LMX research has shown individuals involved in a high-quality dyad have high levels of trust, mutual obligation, and respect; whereas low-quality dyads are absent of trust, mutual obligation, respect, and hinder the follower's experience in the organization (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). This study fills a gap in literature by examining the sport supervisor/head coach dyad. Furthermore, mid-level athletic administrators currently include 45% of all non-coaching staff positions in NCAA intercollegiate athletic departments but have been absent from intercollegiate athletic research (Hardin et al., 2013; Ott & Beaumont, 2020). Considering the influence these relationships might exert on coaches and the athletic department, the purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between NCAA Division I sport supervisors and head coaches.

## **The Role of Sport Supervisor: A Mid-level Manager**

Sport supervisor is not typically a formal title of an athletic administrator in NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics. It is more common for mid-level athletic administrators to hold this role in addition to the tasks associated with their formal titles and primary roles (e.g., associate athletic director of marketing, assistant athletic director for strategy and innovation). It is also common for sport supervisors to serve on the executive or senior level of the athletic administration. Situated within the organizational structure as such, these athletic administrators serve as mid-level managers connecting the athletic director with individual units and/or teams.

While most leadership studies in intercollegiate athletics have focused on athletic directors (Grappendorf & Lough, 2006; Hardin et al., 2013; Taylor & Hardin, 2016; Welty Peachey & Burton, 2011; Whisenant et al., 2002) and coaches (Kim & Andrew, 2015; Turner & Chelladurai, 2005), middle management roles and relationships like those of a sport supervisor and head coach have yet to be explored. Interestingly, middle managers in other industry sectors, like business and higher education, have been studied extensively. Research in these areas have found middle managers influence multiple functions of organizations including organizational strategy (Currie & Proctor, 2005; Van Rensburg, et al., 2014), knowledge integration and transfer (Costanzo & Tzoumpa, 2008), emotional support (Huy, 2002), and idea generation (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1997; Dutton et al., 1997; Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990). Thus, it is important to look at the relationship of sport supervisors and coaches (a) to understand the relationship and (b) consider how the quality may impact organizational functions. As such, this study

employed leader-member exchange as a framework to explore and understand the relationship between sport supervisors and head coaches.

### **Leader-Member Exchange (LMX)**

As a leadership theory, leader-member exchange (LMX) suggests that supervisors create differentiated relationships with their followers; the relationship a supervisor builds with a follower impacts not just the follower, but also the organization's performance (Dansereau et al., 1975). In seminal studies, followers who developed high-quality relationships with their supervisors were identified as the "in-group," while followers with low-quality relationship with their supervisors were identified as the "out-group." (Dansereau et al., 1975). Recognizing the importance of the social exchange occurring between the supervisor and the follower, LMX derived from role theory which identified the exchange of expectations and behaviors between dyadic members in a role set (i.e., sport supervisor and head coach). While role theory focused on the expectations and behaviors of the individuals, LMX is centered on the social exchange of the leader/follower dyad (Graen & Scandura, 1987, Graen et al., 1982b).

Building from Kahn et al.'s (1964) role episode model which elucidated the process of information exchange (e.g., expectations and behaviors) between the members in the role set, Graen and Scandura (1987) developed a descriptive model of role making. Role making is a phased approach to describe how relationships between supervisors and followers are developed. The role making approach includes three phases: (1) role taking, (2) role making, and (3) role-routinization (Graen & Scandura, 1987). In the role taking phase, also known as the sampling phase, the supervisor exchanges task needs with the follower. The relationship is an act/react relationship between the supervisor and the

follower (Graen & Scandura, 1987). With an understanding of what the follower can accomplish (tasks), the role making phase begins with the introduction of exchanging behaviors and expectations. Thus, in the role making phase, the social exchange of the relationship between the supervisor and the follower is in the forefront. When behaviors between the supervisor and the follower are interlocked, the relationship has reached the role routinization phase (Graen & Scandura, 1987).

Building from the role making process with the focus on the creation of higher quality relationship through the leadership lens, Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) examined the process of LMX through the Leadership Making model. A subset of LMX, the Leadership Making model is a descriptive, practical approach to understanding how supervisors may work with each follower. Thus, where other leadership models take a leader-centric or follower-centric perspective, LMX illustrates the process that links the leader and the follower with a focus on the social exchange between the two parties (Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Sparrowe & Liden, 1997). Because the purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between NCAA Division I sport supervisors and head coaches, the focus is on *how* sport supervisors and head coaches interact to build their relationship. Thus, this study utilizes Graen and Uhl-Bien's (1991, 1995) Leadership Making model to understand the perceived relationship between the sport supervisor and the head coach in NCAA Division I athletics.

The Leadership Making model considers the supervisor-subordinate dyad from a partnership perspective. Instead of focusing on how a supervisor builds differentiated relationships, which was the focus of early LMX literature (Dansereau et al., 1975), the Leadership Making model focuses on the process each supervisor can take to build an

effective relationship with each follower (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) believed supervisors should want to develop a high-quality relationship with all subordinates; thus, supervisors should provide the initial offer of a high-quality relationship to each of their subordinates.

Graen and Uhl-Bien (1995) identify three stages within the Leadership Making model, the “stranger” phase, the “acquaintance” phase, and the “mature partnership” phase. In the “stranger” phase, the interactions between the supervisor and the follower are transactional in nature. The focus is on the job and tasks and what the follower needs from the supervisor to be successful. The “acquaintance” phase occurs when either the supervisor or the follower makes an “offer” to the other member of the dyad for a deeper working relationship (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). During the “acquaintance” phase, the interactions become less transactional as the interactions begin to focus on both work and personal inquiries. Additionally, the overall number of social interactions increases between the two members (Graen & Uhl-Bien). During this phase, the members are “testing the waters” as they share more information with the other member. The third and final stage is the “mature partnership” phase. Members in this stage of the relationship are true partners. They are highly developed relationships where both members share a high level of mutual respect, trust, and obligation for each other and the relationship (Graen & Uhl-Bien). As noted by Graen and Uhl-Bien, “in partnership relationships, the potential for incremental influence is nearly unlimited, due to the enormous breadth and depth of exchange of work-related social contributions that are possible” (p. 232). Through this process, the supervisor and follower move into a true partnership filled with support, encouragement, honesty, and mutual reciprocal influence (Graen & Uhl-Bien,

1995). The mutual reciprocal influence allows the dyad to rotate the leadership role as the members look to accomplish common goals (Graen & Uhl-Bien). Additionally, the hierarchical nature of the relationship diminishes as the relationship becomes more of a peer-to-peer relationship.

### **Factors affecting LMX**

Research has identified numerous factors and outcomes affecting the quality of the relationship between the supervisor and the follower. High-quality dyadic relationships are characterized by mutual trust, respect, and obligation (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). However, for those characteristics to be achieved by the members of the dyad, certain factors from the supervisor and the follower, as well as the interaction between the two, must be present (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). For example, early studies in LMX discovered specific factors of high-quality exchange relationships (Graen, 1976; Graen et al., 1982a; Graen & Schiemann, 1978). In their meta-analysis of antecedents and consequences of LMX, Dulebohn et al. (2012) identified nine follower characteristics, five supervisor characteristics, and seven interpersonal relationship characteristics that research has identified as factors affecting high-quality exchange relationships. The follower characteristics are: (a) competence (Nahrgang & Seo, 2016; Day & Crain, 1992; Dockery & Steiner, 1990; Dulebohn et al., 2012), (b) agreeableness (Perugini et al., 2003), (c) conscientiousness (Barrick & Mount, 1991), (d) extraversion (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Phillips & Bedeian, 1994), (e) neuroticism (Dulebohn et al., 2012), (f) openness (Dulebohn et al., 2012), (g) positive affectivity (Hochwarter, 2003, 2005; Hui et al., 1999; Phillips & Bedeian, 1994), (h) negative affectivity (Hochwarter, 2003, 2005; Hui et al., 1999; Phillips & Bedeian, 1994), and (i)

locus of control (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Kinicki & Vecchio, 1994; Martin et al., 2005). Conversely, the supervisor characteristics identified are: (a) supervisor's expectations of followers (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Liden et al., 1993), (b) contingent reward behavior (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Wayne et al., 2002), (c) transformational leadership (Dulebohn et al., 2012), (d) extraversion (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Judge et al., 2002), and (e) agreeableness (Dulebohn et al., 2012). Furthermore, the following seven interpersonal relationship factors were identified: (a) perceived similarity (Engle & Lord, 1997; Dulebohn et al., 2012; Liden et al., 1993; Phillips & Bedeian, 1994; Turban & Jones, 1988), (b) affect/liking (Engle & Lord, 1997; Liden et al., 1993; Wayne & Ferris, 1990), (c) ingratiation (supervisor reported) (Dulebohn et al., 2012), (d) ingratiation (follower reported) (Dulebohn et al., 2012), (e) self-promotion (Dulebohn et al., 2012), (f) assertiveness (Dulebohn et al., 2012), and (g) leader trust (Brower et al., 2000; Dulebohn et al., 2012; Lewicki et al., 2006; McAllister, 1995). While the examination of factors affecting LMX has been examined quantitatively, such examination tells us little about the actual human experience, therefore, it is essential to understand the outcomes that these factors influence.

### **Outcomes Associated with LMX**

LMX posits that, "the quality of the relationship that develops between a leader and a follower is predictive of outcomes at the individual, group, and organizational levels of analysis" (Gerstner & Day, 1997, p.827). Therefore, much of the research on LMX has focused on the relationship between LMX and outcomes (Epitropaki & Martin, 2016). As Dulebohn et al. (2012) noted, the quality of the supervisor-follower relationship determines critical organizational outcomes. The outcomes examined in the

LMX literature include (a) behavioral (Dulebohn et al., 2012), (b) attitudinal (Epitropaki & Martin, 2016; Gerstner & Day, 1997), (c) role status (Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen et al., 1982b) and (d) perceptual measures (Dulebohn et al., 2012). Continuing to follow the framework provided by the meta-analysis completed by Dulebohn et al. (2012), these outcomes are relevant to the understanding the role of the sport supervisor and more specifically, the relationship between the sport supervisor and head coach.

**Table 1**

*Summary of LMX Determinants and Outcomes*

Dyad Member	Characteristics/Outcomes
<b>Supervisor Characteristics</b>	Supervisor's expectations of followers Contingent reward behavior Transformational leadership Extraversion Agreeableness
<b>Follower Characteristics</b>	Competence Agreeableness Conscientiousness Extraversion Neuroticism Openness Positive affectivity Negative affectivity Locus of Control
<b>Interpersonal Characteristics</b>	Perceived similarity Affect/Liking Ingratiation (supervisor reported) Ingratiation (follower reported) Self-promotion Assertiveness Leader trust
<b>Outcomes</b>	Behavioral Attitudinal Role status Perceptual measures



## **LMX in Sport**

LMX has been used as a framework in the context of sport organizations to explain the dyadic relationships that exist within the sport environment. Studies have focused on the coach/athlete relationship (Case, 1998; Caliskan, 2015; Cranmer, 2016; Cranmer & Myers, 2015) and the relationship between board chairs and volunteer board members (Bang, 2011, 2013; Hoye, 2004, 2006). Interestingly, LMX has been used minimally within intercollegiate athletics, Sagas and Cunningham (2004) assessed head coach/assistant coach dyads and Kent and Chelladurai (2001) examined administrator/staff dyads. The administrator/coach dyad has not yet been examined.

The coach/athlete relationship has been a commonly studied dyad in the sport context. In an early examination of LMX and the coach/athlete relationship studies found starters reported higher quality LMX relationships with their head coaches than non-starters (Case, 1998; Cranmer, 2016). Moreover, coaches who provide emotional support and reciprocal communication strategies can build higher quality LMX relationships with their players regardless of starting status (Cranmer, 2015, 2016). Expanding the influence of the LMX relationship between a coach and athlete, Cranmer (2015) found athletes who had high-quality LMX relationships with their coach also had better relationships with their teammates. Thus, further highlighting the importance of high quality LMX relationships between coaches and their athletes and the effect on the team. Similar findings were present in the head coach/assistant coach dyad, where a higher-quality LMX relationship between the head coach and assistant coach positively impacted the job and career satisfaction of the assistant coach (Sagas & Cunningham, 2004).

Looking specifically at the members in volunteer sport organizations, Hoye (2004, 2006) examined different dyadic relationships present in these organizations (e.g., executive/board chair; executive/board member; and board chair/board member), board performance and how such relationships are developed. Board members identified as the out-group while the executive/board chair dyad was reported as a higher-quality LMX relationship (Hoye, 2004). Similarly, within the same organizational context, Bang (2011, 2013) found high-quality LMX relationships influence both job satisfaction and intention to stay. Bang (2011, 2013) also found follower's value a supervisor's professional knowledge while supervisors have a strong desire for affect with their followers. In other words, followers in volunteer sport organizations are satisfied and stay with the organization because they respect the knowledge of the supervisor and see the experience as a learning opportunity. Supervisors, on the other hand, stay involved because they enjoy the relationship with their fellow members. Hoye (2006) conducted a follow-up study examining how the relationships in volunteer sport organizations are developed through semi-structured interviews of members (executives, board chairs, and board members) of the same organizations. The qualitative findings confirmed high-quality LMX relationship with the executive/board chair dyad which was found to be integral to the performance of the board (Hoye, 2006). Additionally, mutual respect and trust were found to be imperative to the establishment of a mature LMX relationship and it was acknowledged that mature relationships take time (Hoye, 2006).

Examining the athletic administrator/follower dyad through the theoretical lens of LMX, Kent and Chelladurai (2001) used LMX and the dimensions of transformational leadership as mediating variables to understand if leadership trickles down from the

athletic director, through middle managers (e.g., assistant or associate athletic directors), to third-tier employees. Their findings showed that LMX correlated with two dimensions of transformational leadership, charismatic leadership and individualized consideration, as well as with organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). In addition to providing empirical justification between LMX, some dimensions of transformational leadership, and OCB, this study also confirmed that the leadership of middle managers in intercollegiate athletic departments matters (Kent & Chelladurai, 2001). Doherty and Danylchuk (1996) examined the coach/administrator dyad at Canadian institutions through the theoretical lens of transformational/transactional leadership. Head coaches and the athletic administrators (e.g., athletic directors and assistant athletic directors) they reported to completed the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) (Bass & Avolio, 1991). Administrators were perceived to have mainly transformational leadership behavior. However, coaches reported administrators displayed individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation less often than the more leader-centered dimensions of transformational leadership, idealized influence and attributed charisma (Doherty & Danylchuk, 1996). Doherty and Danylchuk (1996) hypothesized that the follower-centered behaviors of individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation may be more difficult to observe than the more leader-centric dimensions. However, they also noted that “the ADs/AADs may not be as adept, or interested, in the seemingly more demanding follower-centered behaviors” (Doherty & Danylchuk, 1996, p. 305). Ultimately, this studied identified a strong desire by head coaches for athletic administrators to lead them with individualized consideration (Doherty & Danylchuk,

1996). Thus, more research on the coach/administrator dyad is needed to understand the relationship from the perceptions of both the supervisor and the follower.

### **Method**

The purpose of this study was to explore how individual members in the NCAA Division I sport supervisor and head coach dyad perceive the relationship, a descriptive phenomenological approach was utilized to understand this relationship from the lived experiences of the individuals in the dyad (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). This approach allowed researchers to capture the complexity of the experiences of each member of the dyad (Glesne, 2016). Qualitative research, especially the interpretative approach, recognizes that reality is a social construct that is derived by the individuals in the given context (Glesne, 2016). Thus, the perceptions of individuals are the reality. With a dearth of research on this population and relationship in the organizational setting of NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics, it is necessary to take an exploratory approach to understand this dyad.

### **Participant Sample**

The population for this study was sport supervisors and head coaches of NCAA Division I institutions. Criterion sampling guided the selection process for participants in the study (Suri, 2011). To be included in the study, participants needed to meet the criteria of being either a sport supervisor or head coach at an NCAA Division I institution. Sport supervisors were identified as those with assigned supervisory responsibilities to a specific team or teams (e.g., football, women's soccer) within the athletic department. Sport supervisors were selected based on the following criteria, (a) an athletic administrator from a NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletic department, and

(b) formal designation of the role of sport supervisor for one or more sports as identified on the department staff directory or through the individual's on-line biography. Head coaches were identified as those with the formal title of 'head coach' (e.g., men's basketball head coach) of a specific sport as identified on the department staff directory.

After receiving Institutional Review Board approval for the study, emails were sent to a random selection of individuals located on departmental websites that met the criteria for the study and to professional contacts of the first author. Follow-up emails were sent two weeks later. From these connections and through snowball sampling a total of 22 participants (11 sport supervisors and 11 head coaches) from various NCAA Division I institutions participated in the study. Sport supervisor participants represented nine different conferences including FBS and FCS (Table 2). Head coach participants represented seven different conferences including FBS and FCS (Table 3).

### **Data Collection**

Semi-structured interviews with sport supervisors and head coaches were conducted by the first author. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to understand the experience from the interviewee's point of view, thus bringing meaning and understanding to their experience as their own and as it relates to others (Kvale, 1996). Each interview was conducted via Zoom, a video conferencing website, or via phone and lasted 40 to 80 minutes. Each interview was recorded and then transcribed using Otter ai, a voice transcription service.

Before beginning the study, pilot studies with a former sport supervisor and a former head coach were conducted. Minor edits were made to the interview protocol based on recommendations by the pilot study participants. The interview questions were

developed from the LMX theory literature and adapted for the role of the sport supervisor and head coach, respectively. Interview questions for sport supervisors included questions to understand the relationship between the sport supervisor and the head coach. Interview questions included, (a) in one word, describe your relationship with the head coach(es) you supervise. (Grean & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Hoye, 2006); (b) in your role as a sport supervisor, what are the most helpful behaviors?

**Table 2***Sport Supervisor Participants*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Job</b>	<b>Revenue/Non-Revenue</b>	<b>Years in Current Position</b>	<b>Years as a Sport Supervisor</b>	<b>Years at Current Institution</b>	<b>Years in college sports</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race</b>
Sandy	Senior Associate AD	Strategic Affairs	Non-Revenue	0-2 years	15	12	26	F	W
Peyton	Executive Senior Associate Athletics Director	External Affairs	Non-Revenue	16 - 20 years	9	19	24	M	W
Andrea	Deputy Athletics Director	Internal Affairs	Revenue & Priority	10 - 15 years	14	14	24	F	AA
Virginia	Senior Associate AD	External Affairs - Development	Non-Revenue	3 - 5 years	4 as primary/ 3 as secondary	4	13	F	W
Rexton	Deputy Athletic Director	Internal & External Affairs	Non-Revenue	3 - 5 years	20	3.5	33	M	W
Sarah	Senior Associate Athletic Director	Internal Affairs	Non-Revenue	3 - 5 years	3		8	F	B
Linda	Deputy Athletic Director/SWA	Internal Affairs	Revenue & Non-Revenue	0	12	20.5	20.5	F	W
Sheldon	Chief Financial Officer	Finance	Non-Revenue	3 - 5 years	4	7	9	M	W
Dave	Deputy Director of Athletics and CFO	Finance	Non-Revenue	20+ years	16	25	30	M	W
Paula	Chief of Staff/Sr. Associate Athletics Director	Internal Affairs	Tier I & 2	10 - 15 years	18	12	20	F	W
Marlon	Deputy Director of Athletics	Finance & External Affairs	Priority	0 - 2 years	14	8 months	14 year	M	B

**Table 3***Head Coach Participants*


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<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Sport</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Revenue/Non-Revenue</b>	<b>Years in Current Position</b>	<b>Years with Current Sport Supervisor</b>	<b>Sport Supervisor Gender</b>	<b>Sport Supervisor Race</b>
Charlene	Women's Basketball	F	B	Revenue	2	2	F	W
David	Men's Soccer	M	W	Non-Revenue	2	1	M	W
William	Women's Soccer	M	W	Non-Revenue	8	2	F	W
Samantha	Women's Volleyball	F	W	Non-Revenue	5	2	F	W
Heather	Softball	F	W	Non-Revenue (Priority Sport)	10	1	F	W
Matt	Football	M	W	Revenue	1	5 months	M	W
Brad	Men's Soccer	M	W	Non-Revenue	3	5 months	F	W
Duncan	Rifle	M	W	Non-Revenue	16	2	M	W
Lamar	Men's Soccer	M	W	Non-Revenue	4	3	M	W
Sally	Field Hockey	F	W	Non-Revenue	3	3	F	W
Rachel	Women's Basketball	F	B	Revenue	2	2	F	W



a coach can display to build an effective relationship with you? (Dulebohn et al., 2012); (c) do you consider you and your current head coach to have similar interests, values, and attitudes? (Dulebohn et al., 2012). Interview questions for head coaches included questions to understand the relationship between the sport supervisor and the head coach. Interview questions included, (a) in one or two words, what is your relationship with your sport supervisor based? (Grean & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Hoye, 2006); (b) do you consider you and your sport supervisor to have similar interests, values, and attitudes? (Dulebohn et al., 2012); (c) how does your sport supervisor provide feedback to you? (Dulebohn et al., 2012).

### **Data Analysis**

As interviews concluded and transcripts were available and accurate, the first author read and re-read the transcripts several times before breaking the interviews into separate parts for the coding process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study utilized both deductive and inductive coding. Deductive coding, also known as a prior coding, is the development of codes before data collection typically from previous literature (Miles et al., 2020). Conversely, inductive codes emerge through the data analysis process (Miles et al., 2020).

First cycle and second cycle coding were utilized to develop themes from the data. Attribute and in vivo coding guided the first cycle coding phase while pattern coding guided the second cycle phase. Attribute coding was utilized to provide context to the sample. Specific self-reported demographic information from each participant was collected from each participant (see Tables 1 and 2) to better understand the sample. This data included the participant's formal title, institution, years working in the

intercollegiate athletics industry, years in current role, years served as a sport supervisor or head coach, gender, and race. In vivo coding utilized the participant's voice and words to explain the relationship. Once first cycle codes were developed, pattern coding was utilized during the second cycle coding phase to group the data discovered during first cycle coding into a "smaller number of categories, themes, or concepts" (Saldaña, 2016, p.236). Themes were identified for each participant group, sport supervisor and head coach. Additionally, one shared theme emerged.

### **Findings**

As a leadership theory, Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) serves as a useful tool to understand the relationship between a supervisor and a follower. The different perspectives from the sport supervisors and head coaches describing what is needed to build a high-quality relationship illustrates the complexity of the relationship between the sport supervisor and the head coach in NCAA Division I athletics. Overall, a total of six themes derived from the data. Interestingly, only one theme was shared by all participants. Sport supervisors indicated one additional theme while head coaches indicated four additional themes, including two that contribute to a low-quality relationship. An overview of each of the themes follows.

#### **Trust (Shared)**

Trust is defined as, "the willingness to be vulnerable" (Mayer et al., 1995) and previous research on LMX (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) has identified it as a needed component to build a high-quality relationship which are "mutual partnerships."

Therefore, it is not surprising that trust emerged as a shared theme. Nine out of the 11 sport supervisors interviewed identified trust when asked about the relationship between

the sport supervisor and the head coach. Ten out of the 11 head coaches indicated trust between themselves and the sport supervisor as imperative for a high-quality relationship.

From the sport supervisor perspective, Virginia noted, “And I think my [sport] coach trusts trust me, because he knows that I really care.” Dave described the relationship and the importance of trust by stating,

you have to develop trust, you know, she [head coach] has to trust that I don't have any ulterior motives, she has to trust that I'm going to have the best interests of her staff and the student athletes, you know, she has to trust that if there's something wrong with the program, and there's a problem, I'm going to tell her and that it's not she has to trust and not. So many times I see coaches that that they're so fearful that they're going to lose their job. And sometimes I don't think a sport administrator, sports supervisor does enough to communicate to a coach that look, you're not in danger. Just coach your team. Don't worry about it. If there is a problem, I will tell you.

Similarly, Linda expressed how sport supervisors build trust with their coaches by matching your actions with your words. She stated,

you know, showing integrity being, you know, coming through on what you say you're going to do. And then if you said you were going to do something and then it can't happen for some reason, or it changes going in yourself and saying, Hey, I wanted to let you know when I know I said this. But now it's this and I apologize if I misled you or I misspoke. I wasn't aware of the circumstances or circumstances change. I think that's in the onus of building trust.

Linda also acknowledged, that it is important for a sport supervisor to be vulnerable with a head coach in order to build trust in the relationship. She shared,

But also, like, letting them get to know you being a little say vulnerable, but it's, you know, you got to open up a little bit to know Hey, yeah. Come here, like, how can I help you? And if they're like, hey, they really are, they really do have my back? They are really looking out for me.

Similarly, from a head coach's perspective, David described the evolution of his relationship with his sport supervisor stating,

Our relationship started off incredibly diplomatic all the time. And as we've kind of gone on this season and had some success. I kind of remarked to [assistant coach] just yesterday only that I kind of feel I'm in a circle of trust now; that he's [sport supervisor] kind of let his guard down a bit. And he's far more transparent with me regarding other things that might be going on higher up the food chain within administration, or just the way that he shares with me now is not what it was at the start of this, what was a business relationship has evolved into a friendship as well, which just makes my life so much easier as well.

David noted that it “took me a while to build that trust with him” but feels the ease the trust has built as he recognized he and his sport supervisor can speak freely to each other, “we both have zero inhibitions when we walk in the room and have a conversation.” Charlene echoed the sentiment of creating safety and transparency to build trust in describing how her and her sport supervisor, each of whom are of different racial backgrounds, were able to build trust in their relationship early on through conversations about social justice:

A lot of it was probably stemmed from social justice, that she just be, like, straightforward. Well, as a white person, you know, I would think this or, you know, this is why I didn't understand that. And I think, you know, both of us creating this safe space, because, you know, I'd say kind some of the similar things to her. But I know it happened at a time that she was really curious. And she'd said mentioned a few times that she just had never had a person that she can just talk and not feel like, you know, there's no judgment with us, or just like a complete judgment free zone, you might say something maybe, come out wrong, but we both have built that relationship where it can come out wrong, and we can still finish the conversation and say why it was wrong. Or say why you should say different, and it's been a cool relationship

When sport supervisors are willing to be vulnerable with their head coaches, they can build the trust and develop high-quality relationships that are true partnerships. As Charlene noted, "I didn't anticipate the type of relationship that [sport supervisor] and I were able to build, you know, honestly, just in terms of like a working relationship, but then almost as just more into a friendship in a lot of ways."

Conversely, when thinking what they desired in a relationship with their sport supervisor, Lamar and Rachel both gave examples of how they wished they had more trust in their relationship with their sport supervisor. Lamar hopes for "the trust that I could say anything and it's not going to affect the future of my job here." While Rachel shared, "I'll just say for my part that lack of trust comes from the understanding of what I feel like I'm up against, and you know, the I think the benefit of the doubt is not always given to me if that makes sense."

William and Samantha, also acknowledged the importance of trust in the sport supervisor/head coach relationship. William stated, “trust is critical, if you don’t have trust it won’t work right.” Similarly, Samantha confirmed, “the trust and the understanding is the most important things, and the common goal” when discussing the importance of the relationship.

Sport supervisors and head coaches, like other partnerships, require a strong sense of trust. When trust is present and felt by both parties, they experience a sense of support and safety to foster a healthy and effective partnership.

### **Transparency (Sport Supervisors)**

The additional theme identified by sport supervisors as critical to building a high-quality relationship was transparency. Marlon noted that without transparency from his head coaches he could not adequately advocate or support them. He stated,

So if our job is to support and protect and be a resource, you're better off keeping me updated on issues. Because if you don't, and I'm surprised by something that's 100% on you, and I can't go to bat for you. I can't help you navigate how to handle those situations.

Sarah shared a similar sentiment,

Like, I think you have to trust the sport supervisor understands and knows that you're managing your program, but I can advocate for you better if I know what's going on. And I have a lot of meetings where [sports] come up, and I don't know where your position is on things then you're at a disadvantage because I'm missing an opportunity to speak up for you...But I think that just being open to

the sport supervisor in that way is a helpful behavior and mindset of a head coach in order to build the most effective relationship.

Linda echoed the importance of transparency in building the partnership with the head coach. She stated,

I think one of the pieces is being forthcoming, not creating the divide or a silo of like, “don't tell the administration” like let's keep this in house and handle it, like, just being forthcoming and open and honest with, you know, what's going on in the program? I mean, like, hey, like, how's everything?...He or she is providing information to me. That's really helpful. And then we can be very productive moving forward because I can help those coaches through those situations.

From a sport supervisor perspective, head coaches can build high-quality relationships with their sport supervisors by building trust and being transparent. Sport supervisors also acknowledged they must show trustworthy behavior (i.e., doing what you say you will do), in addition to head coaches showing trust in the expertise of the sport supervisor. Additionally, when head coaches are transparent with their sport supervisor, it strengthens the sport supervisor's trust in their head coach as well; therefore, strengthening the overall relationship.

### **Overall Care and an Investment in the Program (Head Coaches)**

In addition to trust, coaches identified overall care and an investment in the program as another need for a high-quality relationship with their sport supervisor. Charlene exemplified this when she stated, “I think knowing that she cares about me as a person allows me to trust her.” Thus, when sport supervisors think about the overall care, it is not just about the program or the coach, but about the coach as a person. This

concept is consistent with the LMX literature that notes that leaders in high-quality relationships share information and resources on a personal level, not just at the work level (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Sally shared a similar sentiment when she described her relationship with her sport supervisor:

And I think just positivity. Like, for me, I'm a pretty positive coach and a positive person. And so like, having that person [sport supervisor] that can kind of uplift me when maybe there's times throughout the season that are really, really tough. Can I go sit in her office? And can she kind of like, give me some energy and that positivity, like so then I can give that to my team?

In discussing how a sport supervisor can demonstrate their investment into the program, David shared the following story:

So I think [sport supervisor] is quite proud of, you know, his baby, if you like, his program. And as we all are, obviously, but like, I, I believe this sincerity, like when we lost against [opponent in NCAA tournament], I could tell that it really hurt him. And I think that's really, I think that's really important...I think he's emotionally invested in it now, as well.

Heather recognized that sport supervisors that are emotionally invested help the coach feel like a priority,

Invested meaning so if there's 35 sports at a school and your supervisor is overseeing 12, that you still feel important to them, you know, that they truly do care about your program and the happenings of your program. You don't want to feel dismissed in those conversations of like, you know, there's a football game and sorry, you're not important today.



Heather also noted that sport supervisors can show investment through check-ins. She gave the example of asking coaches about recruiting trips or how practices are going, “I think those check-ins can make you feel like they’re [sport supervisor] invested.”

Interestingly, Lamar suggested that sport supervisors can build trust by “showing they [sport supervisors] are invested...show that this means something to them.”

Coaches desire a sport supervisor that will care about them as a person as well as their program. By showing care and an overall investment in the program, sport supervisors can show their emotional investment in the program and thus, feel like true partners with their head coaches.

### **Intentional Presence (Physical and Emotional Presence) (Head Coaches)**

The third and final theme identified by head coaches is the desire for sport supervisors to have an intentional presence with the head coaches and the program. Intentional presence is a two-prong approach that includes physical presence (i.e., visibility) and emotional presence (i.e., accessible). Examples of physical presence shared by head coaches includes, being around the program on more than just game days; consistent face-to-face interactions with the coach, coaching staff, and players; and physical proximity of offices. Emotional presence is described as being accessible to the head coach for support and to be a sounding board.

Charlene described how her sport supervisor is a frequent visitor to practices, “she she's around a lot. I think she comes to practices a few times a week.” Sally expressed the importance of her sport supervisor being physically present as it relates to the student-athletes:

the importance of that support, like seeing her at our games or like seeing her interact with our players. I think that really shows that she supports our program. I think that's really important to me.

In discussing what she would want in a relationship with her sport supervisor, Rachel discussed how she would like her sport supervisor to be physically present stating, “being visible, whether it’s in practices, at maybe events that we’re doing at games and showing that you are completely invested in our team and in what it is that we are doing.”

David highlighted how the physical proximity of his office to his sport supervisor’s office has aided in the quality of their relationship,

So, proximity between our offices is great, he's 30 steps down the hallway from from me. So honestly, that aspect of things, as I said, as the as our relationship has evolved, has become more and more informal.... So, funnily enough, when I come upstairs into the building, he's pretty much the first office I see, to get to my office. So, if the door is ajar, and I've got five minutes, I'll put my head and if he's not too busy, what I think will be a five-minute conversation can sometimes be 20 minutes to half an hour. So, there's a really informal nature to our relationship now. Similarly, he has no reservations about walking down here, coming into my office sitting down and we have a little couch area just in front of where I'm sitting at my desk, but he'll sit there, cross his legs, look very, very comfortable. Very, you know what I mean? And we'll talk about anything; so we lose a lot of our day just talking

Discussing emotional presence, Charlene described the importance of the sport supervisor being accessible to a head coach stating,

I keep coming back to that word accessibility, just because I think people say they can be there, and then when they're not there, even if it is, like, I'll joke with you, you don't have to respond to the text, at least like it. So you can get back to me or something like that if it's something important, but I just think the accessibility because that's where people start to feel a bit either frustrated or lonely, like, you know, I wanted to reach out and talk when you weren't there. And so I think that part is, is big.

Heather echoed her appreciation for her sport supervisor being accessible stating, “her accessibility is what makes her a great supervisor. I think that how she's able to respond and be available for us is absolutely something that I value.”

Simply stated, sport supervisors who are present (physically and emotionally) have high quality relationships with their head coaches. Conversely, sport supervisors who are not intentional about being both physically (e.g., traveling with the team, attending practices occasionally, going to the coach's office) and emotionally present (e.g., accessible) develop low-quality relationship with their head coaches. Thus, the theme of lack of presence was developed from head coaches with low-quality relationships. Both Rachel and Lamar discussed how their respective sport supervisor was not visible and how, ideally, their sport supervisor would be more present, both physically and emotionally. Lamar shared his frustration in the lack of visibility of his sport supervisor when describing their weekly check-in meetings. He shared that his sport supervisor doesn't always attend their weekly check-in meetings, “our weekly check-in meetings that sometimes he's on and sometimes he's not.” Rachel expressed how being

physically present can help the coach feel supported and create a sense of emotional support for her. She shared,

I do want you [sport supervisor] to know what's going on, you know what I mean? So I don't know, I think it should be kind of a meet in the middle, I want you to know, what's going on in my sport, so that if something does come up, you are almost like, you know, you're aware of what's going on already. So you can kind of say, hey, no, I've seen this with my own eyes. Or, you know what I mean, I've been around [coach], I've seen her coach, I know, you know, how she approaches things.

Rachel also discussed how she had to advocate for herself due to the lack of presence of her sport supervisor when it came to a student-athlete issue. She shared, “And I think if she would have been around a little bit more, she would have understood a little bit more. Just you know, why the things were happening, my perspective on it, and could have spoken to it a little better.”

### ***Evaluative Focus (Head Coaches – Low-Quality Relationship)***

In addition to the sport supervisors not being present, Lamar and Rachel both discussed how their relationship with their sport supervisor felt less like a partnership and more like they were being evaluated. Thus, the theme of evaluative focus was derived from head coaches with low-quality relationships. Lamar provided the example, “Well, again, when you don’t come around very often, and then all of a sudden you come around when you lose a game, it makes you feel that that’s [winning] the only thing that matters.” He continued,

not being around not knowing what we're doing on a daily basis, not seeing the good that we've done, and only coming into the picture when something's maybe not going as well as it should? And that, that leads me to not want to go to him if there's something minimal even that I need to I need help with. Right? I just don't want to do that because it could ignite something bigger and I'm like, this is now my boss. So, I feel like he's my boss.

Lamar shared another example when discussing the role of his sport supervisor in the decision-making process stating, “Back to the comments I made before about being evaluated. For instance, it's like is that a recommendation? Or is that something we should do? And if I don't do it, am I being evaluated? Because we didn't do it?” Lamar noted that “as time has progressed, it's more difficult to call even, just simply because I guess I do feel a little bit of being evaluated.”

Head coaches experience low-quality relationships with their sport supervisors when the sport supervisor is not present. Sport supervisors who do not prioritize being present (visible and accessible) dilute the trust in the relationship with their head coach. Additionally, not being present creates a sense of uncertainty for the head coach when the sport supervisor does come around. While evaluation is undoubtedly an important component to any job, for coaches that experienced a feeling of being constantly evaluated, it eroded the relationship of trust.

### **Differences/Similarities**

When examining the relationship of the sport supervisor and the head coach from the perspective of each individual in the relationship, there are similarities and differences in what each group needs to build an effective relationship. Both groups,

sport supervisors and head coaches, identified trust as an integral component of the sport supervisor/head coach relationship. In the examples from the head coaches, the role of trust was apparent in the development of the high-quality relationships and the strong desire for trust from those head coaches in low-quality relationships. Trust was, however, the only similarity.

Differences emerged as head coaches felt high-quality relationships are built when sport supervisors have an overall care for the coach and the program as well as show investment in the program. Additionally, coaches feel very strongly about the need for sport supervisors to be intentionally present, both physically and emotionally, to build a high-quality relationship with their head coaches. Contrastingly, sport supervisors note that it is important for head coaches to be transparent with sport supervisors. Doing so allows the sport supervisor to more properly support and advocate for the program. When the sport supervisor is left in the outside looking in, they are more of an acquaintance than a partner.

**Table 3**

*Head Coach/Sport Supervisor Relationship Themes*

<b>Type of Relationship (Dyad Perspective)</b>	Theme #1	Theme #2	Theme #3
<b>High Quality Relationships (Coach's Perspective)</b>	Trust	Overall care and investment in the program	Intentional presence
<b>High Quality Relationships (Sport Supervisor's Perspective)</b>	Trust	Transparency	

## **Discussion**

Findings from this study illustrate that both head coaches and sport supervisors recognize the importance of the relationship between the sport supervisor and the head coach. However, there is a discrepancy in how high-quality relationships between the sport supervisor and the head coach are built. Thus, this study provides important practical findings for current and future sport supervisors and head coaches navigating this important role. Additionally, this study's findings expand the LMX literature by adding new factors (i.e., intentional presence, overall care and investment) or determinants impacting the quality of the relationship.

In discussing the factors typically found in high-quality relationships, previous literature identified 21 factors (9 follower characteristics, 5 supervisor characteristics, and 7 interpersonal relationship characteristics). While this study confirmed that trust is an integral component of a high-quality relationship between a sport supervisor and a head coach, it illuminated two new supervisor desired factors: (1) care and investment in the program, and (2) intentional presence as identified by head coaches. Sport supervisors desired transparency from their coaches.

For sport supervisors, transparency is highly related to a successful relationship with the head coach. The sport supervisor and head coach relationship is a unique relationship as individual sport programs act in many ways as their own organization, while still part of a larger organization. Thus, sport supervisors find themselves in a

challenging middle management role balancing the needs of the athletic department with the individual needs of the program(s) they supervise and the head coaches they oversee (Green & Hancock, in-press). To build a high-quality relationship, both individuals need to be willing to share information as the sport supervisor craves transparency and the head coach desires investment into their program from the sport supervisor. Sport supervisors need head coaches to be transparent with them so that they can feel included and be stronger supporters and advocates for their programs. Head coaches who fail to share information, good and bad, with their sport supervisors, create estrangement in their relationship with their sport supervisor causing the sport supervisor to feel uninvolved, disjointed, and disconnected from the head coach and the program. Thus, making it difficult for them to be their partner, as was indicated by head coaches in previous literature (Green & Hancock, in-press).

Sport supervisors can earn the respect of their coaches by taking the time to learn and understand the specific intricacies associated with the sports they supervise. In doing so, they demonstrate to head coaches their knowledge of the sport. This is similar to the findings by Bang (2011, 2013) which highlighted supervisors can build respect with their followers by showing their knowledge and expertise. While coaches do not expect sport supervisors to be experts in the X's and O's of the sport, their level of trust and respect for their sport supervisor increases when sport supervisors have knowledge of their sport and of trends occurring within their sport. Sport supervisors who obtain this knowledge prove their investment and support in the program, building trust and respect with the head coach. Interestingly, previous research (Dulebohn et al., 2012; Graen & Scandura,



1987) has associated competence as a follower characteristic, but this study identifies knowledge of sport, or competence, as a desired supervisor characteristic.

It is apparent from the head coaches that to build trust, and thus a high-quality relationship, sport supervisors must be visible and accessible. Therefore, sport supervisors must be intentional about leaving their offices and deliberately engaging with the program(s) they supervise. In doing so, they show a level of investment and help build trust with the head coaches they supervise. This finding echoes the sentiment found by Doherty and Danylchuk (1996) that showed head coaches are more satisfied, perceived to be more effective, and are willing to perform extra-role behaviors for leaders that are involved. Thus, athletic directors and administrators need to consider the capacity of individuals who take on the role of sport supervision to ensure they can be involved by being visible and accessible. This also includes consideration for the number of sports a sport supervisor oversees as well as the season (e.g., fall, winter, spring) of the sport.

The relationship between the sport supervisor and the head coach is an important relationship, as indicated by the participants in this study. As Rachel shared,

I think the role [of sport supervisor], I think the relationship can, you know, for a coach, it can really, you know, lengthen your career somewhere, you know what I mean? If it's a good relationship, you have somebody speaking positively about you.... You know I think that really directly affects that. So yeah, I think it's truly important. And I think it [the sport supervisor] helps just kind of paint a picture of what you're trying to do.

Nevertheless, like all relationships, it takes work from both members of the relationship, head coaches and sport supervisors, to build a high-quality relationship built on trust, respect, and mutual obligation (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). While both parties desire and recognize the need for a high level of trust within the relationship, there are specific actions each party can take to build a high-quality relationship. Head coaches need to be transparent with their sport supervisor. When head coaches share information with the sport supervisor, the sport supervisor needs to receive it as the coach displaying trust in them and approach it through the lens of being a partner with the head coach and showing overall care and investment in the program. Furthermore, it is imperative for sport supervisors to be intentionally present for the head coaches and programs they supervise. Through those continuous interactions, the sport supervisor builds trust with the head coach making it easier for the head coach to feel comfortable with sharing information. When head coaches are not transparent or sport supervisors are not present, it is likely the relationship will be a low-quality relationship absent of trust. This cycle of trust begins with the sport supervisor being present and showing an overall care and investment in the head coach and the program.

The role of the sport supervisor in NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics is a complex role fraught with role ambiguity and role conflict (Green & Hancock, in-press). Thus, it is critical that sport supervisors acknowledge the importance of the relationship with each of their head coaches and take intentional steps to build a relationship with their head coach. The role of the sport supervisor cannot just be seen as a career steppingstone for athletic administrators (Green & Hancock, in-press) but as a vital component of the success of a head coach and a program. Athletic administrators looking

to move into this role need to do so with intentionality and with a commitment to being present and investing themselves into the program.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Limitations are common in qualitative studies and this study is no different. First, the findings in this study cannot be generalized to all relationships between sport supervisors and head coaches. The conclusions from this study are limited to the experiences of the participants of the study. However, to increase the trustworthiness of the study the data was triangulated using multiple sources to corroborate the findings as well as the use of rich thick descriptions and member checking (Glesne, 2016). Thus, the findings are transferable as individuals in these positions, NCAA Division I head coaches and sport supervisors, can relate to the findings in this study.

There are numerous opportunities for future research in examination of the relationship between the sport supervisor and the head coach. A follow-up quantitative study utilizing the LMX-7 scale as well as including the newly discovered determinates of overall care and investment, intentional presence, and competence as a leader determinant, is recommended with a larger sample. Expanding on the work on organizational stressors in intercollegiate athletic departments, it is suggested to examine the effect of the quality of the relationship between the head coach and the sport supervisor and individual and organizational outcomes such as burnout and on-field success. Furthermore, the relationship between the sport supervisor and the athletic director should also be examined as this study and previous studies on the role of the sport supervisor (Green & Hancock, 2022) confirmed the athletic director as a member of the role set for sport supervisors.

## **Conclusion**

Findings from this study illuminate how sport supervisors and head coaches experience this dyadic relationship providing insights for head coaches, sport supervisors, and athletic directors on the desired needs of both members of the dyad as well as strategies for building high-quality relationships within the dyad. A stronger relationship between the sport supervisor and the head coach will lead to organizational success. While the sport management literature has examined LMX theory, the focus has been on the coach/athlete relationship (Case, 1998; Caliskan, 2015; Cranmer, 2016; Cranmer & Myers, 2015). This study expanded the use of LMX theory in sport management with a specific focus on the administrator/coach relationship, a unique dyadic relationship. Furthermore, this study provided valuable insights for the sport management literature, explicating a vital relationship within intercollegiate athletics.

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## APPENDIX A

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Preliminary Information to discuss before beginning the interview:

- Review informed consent with interviewee. Ensure participant understands their rights and that the interview can be stopped at any point.
- Remind participants of the purpose of the study.
- Explain that all responses will be kept confidential.
- Inform the interviewee that other individuals (Dr. Meg Hancock) will have access to the data collected in this study.
- Thank interviewee at the beginning and end of the interview for participating and providing their insights.

#### **Interview Protocol for Sport Supervisors**

##### **Participant Demographic Information to be Collected**

Demographic information collected is for research purposes only to ensure a diverse population is engaged with the project. Demographic information will not be used for identifying purposes.

- Formal Title
- Institution
- Number of sports they currently supervisor
  - What sports do they currently supervisor (revenue vs. non-revenue)
- Gender
- Race

##### **Career Background**

- Number of years as a sport supervisor (career)
- Number of years as a sport supervisor (current institution)
- Tell me briefly how you entered your first role as a sport supervisor
- Did you want to become a sport supervisor? Explain.



**RQ1. How do athletic administrators, who hold the role of a sport supervisor, perceive their role as a sport supervisor within the intercollegiate athletic department?**

1. In your own words, describe for me the role of a sport supervisor.
2. What are the expectations of a sport supervisor? Who sets the expectations? (Biddle, 1979; Katz & Kahn, 1978; Naylor et al., 1980)
3. How are expectations of your role as a sport supervisor shared with head coaches? (Biddle, 1979; Katz & Kahn, 1978; Naylor et al., 1980)
4. What tasks make-up your role as a sport supervisor? How are the tasks communicated? (Graen & Scandura, 1987; Sparrowe & Liden, 1997).
5. Do tasks of sport supervisors vary? If so, how?
6. In your experience, what behaviors/skills/attributes make an effective sport supervisor? (Harding et al., 2014)
7. What one word describes your attitude toward your role as a sport supervisor?
8. As a sport supervisor, what challenges/barriers do you face?
10. How do you perceive your role as a sport supervisor as it relates to the team's performance?
11. When you took your position as [insert participant's title], was sport supervision a component of the that?  
Follow-up: If no, how did you learn to be a sport supervisor?  
If yes, how did you know and what resources were given to you to navigate this role?

**RQ1a. How do sport supervisors negotiate their day-to-day tasks as a sport supervisor?**

12. Do you feel a delineation of your role as sport supervisor from your [insert participant's title]? (Graen & Scandura, 1987)  
If so, explain that delineation and how you navigate it.  
If no, explain.
13. What obstacles or barriers do you face as you navigate your role as a sport supervisor and an athletic administrator?
14. About how much of your time each day is spent in the role as a sport supervisor?
15. Describe for me how you are evaluated as sport supervisor by your organization.

**RQ 3. How do sport supervisors perceive the relationship between themselves and the head coaches they supervise?**

16. In one word, describe your relationship with the head coach(es) you supervise.  
Follow-up: Tell me more about why that word describes the relationship(s). (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995)
17. In one or two words, what is your relationship with your head coach based on (e.g., trust, respect, mutual obligation, etc.) (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995)

Follow up: Provide an example of how you build [insert word(s) given] with your respective coach(es).

18. In your role as a sport supervisor what are the most helpful behaviors a coach can display to build an effective relationship with you? (Dulebohn et al., 2012)

Follow up: How do you share these behaviors with your coaches?

19. As a sport supervisor, what does a successful relationship with a head coach look like?

Follow up: How do you share this information with your head coach(es)?

20. Provide an example of how you provide feedback to your respective coach(es). (Dulebohn et al., 2012)

21. Do you consider you and your current head coach to have similar interests, values, and attitudes? (Dulebohn et al., 2012)

22. How do you show your coach that you recognize his/her work? (Dulebohn et al., 2012)

Follow up: Does winning influence your relationship with your head coach(es)?

23. How do you reward your coach(es) for their work?

24. About how often do you interact with your coach(es)?

Follow-up:

Is it more/less than you would like?

Describe for me what typical interactions look like (i.e., phone, email, in-person, etc.).

25. For many head coaches, being a head coach is the pinnacle of their career, how do you consider career goals and expectations of your head coaches?

26. Thinking about the head coaches you currently work with, describe for me your current relationship with each of them (i.e., how long have you worked with them, etc.). (Graen & Scandura, 1987; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1991,1995; Uhl-Bien & Graen, 1993)

### **Wrap-up**

22. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your role as a sport supervisor?

Thank you for your time.

## **Interview Protocol for Head Coaches**

### **Participant Demographic Information to be Collected**

Demographic information collected is for research purposes only to ensure a diverse population is engaged with the project. Demographic information will not be used for identifying purposes.

- Formal Title
- Institution
- Years in industry
- Years in current role
- Gender
- Race

### **RQ2. How do head coaches perceive the role of the sport supervisor within intercollegiate athletic departments?**

1. What word would you use to describe the role of sport supervisor? (Dansereau et al., 1975)
2. What skills, expertise, and knowledge do sport supervisors need to be an effective sport supervisor? (Hoye, 2006)
3. Describe a time for me when your sport supervisor met your expectations. (Biddle, 1979; Katz & Kahn, 1978; Naylor et al., 1980)
4. Describe for me how information is shared with you from your sport supervisor.
5. Describe for me how you make decisions for your program.
6. Provide an example to me when your sport supervisor utilized their power to help you solve a problem for your program. (Dansereau et al., 1975)
7. How does your sport supervisor show they understand your role as a head coach?
8. Have you ever left a job because of a poor relationship with a sport supervisor?

### **RQ4. How do head coaches perceive the relationship between themselves and their assigned sport supervisor?**

9. Thinking about your current sport supervisor, describe for me your relationship with them. (Grean & Uhl-Bien, 1995)
10. In one or two words, what is your relationship with your sport supervisor based? (e.g., trust, respect, mutual obligation, etc.) (Grean & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Hoye, 2006)
11. About how often do you interact with your sport supervisor?  
Follow-up: Is this more or less than you would like? Describe for me what the interactions typically look like (i.e., emails, texts, in-person, etc.).
12. As a head coach, describe for me what a successful relationship with a sport supervisor looks and feels like.

Follow-up: How do you share this with your sport supervisor? Are expectations from your sport supervisor shared with you? (Biddle, 1979; Katz & Kahn, 1978; Naylor et al., 1980)

13. Do you consider you and your sport supervisor to have similar interests, values, and attitudes? (Dulebohn et al., 2012)
14. Do you like your current sport supervisor?
15. If any, which of the following words would you use to describe your sport supervisor? (Dulebohn et al., 2012)
16. Do you feel the support of your supervisor waivers depending on your win/loss record? (Dulebohn et al., 2012, pg. 1722)
17. How does your sport supervisor provide feedback to you? (Dulebohn et al., 2012)
18. How does your sport supervisor show you that he or she recognizes your work? (Dulebohn et al., 2012)

Follow-up: Does this form of recognition make you feel recognized? If not, how would you like to see your sport supervisor recognize you?

### **Wrap-up**

19. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about the role of sport supervisor or the relationship between a head coach and sport supervisor?

Thank you for your time.

**Interview Protocol for Sport Supervisors**

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q14	Q15	Q16	Q17	Q18	Q19	Q20	Q21	Q22	Q23	Q24	Q25	Q26	
RQ1: How do athletic administrators, who hold the role of a sport supervisor, perceive their role as a sport supervisor within the intercollegiate athletic department?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X																
RQ #1a: How do sport supervisors negotiate their day-to-day tasks as a sport supervisor?												X	X	X	X												
RQ #3: How do sport supervisors perceive the relationship between themselves and the head coach(es) they supervise?															X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

**Interview Protocol for Head Coaches**

	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 5	Q 6	Q 7	Q 8	Q 9	Q 10	Q 11	Q 12	Q 13	Q 14	Q 15	Q 16	Q 17	Q 18
RQ #2: How do head coaches perceive the role of the sport supervisor within intercollegiate athletic departments?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X										
RQ #4: How do head coaches perceive the relationship between themselves and their assigned sport supervisor?									X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

## APPENDIX B

### SPORT SUPERVISOR RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Hello [participant name]:

I hope this message finds you well.

As partial fulfillment of my Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and Organizational Development with a concentration in Sport Administration, I am conducting a research study to better understand the role of the sport supervisor in NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics.

Given your position as a sport supervisor at a NCAA Division I institution, I would like to invite you to participate in my study. I am requesting one interview of approximately 60 to 90 minutes. The interviews will take place at your convenience. Interviews can be conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams or a similar platform, or in-person. The audio for both the virtual and in-person interviews will be recorded for transcription purposes. Virtual session participants will be able to choose whether they wish to make their video image available for recording. If you agree to participate, please respond to this email, or contact me at 615.457.7868 to schedule a time for an interview.

Attached to this email is the unsigned consent form for your review.

Your feedback is vital to the success of this study. More importantly, your responses will be instrumental in understanding the role of the sport supervisor as a major conduit between the individual teams and the athletic administration.

If you have any questions or need further explanation, please let me know. I hope you will consider my request.

I look forward to

hearing from you. Take

care,

Ehren R. Green  
Ph.D. Student  
University of Louisville

## APPENDIX C

### HEAD COACH RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Hello [participant name]:

I hope this message finds you well.

As partial fulfillment of my Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and Organizational Development with a concentration in Sport Administration, I am conducting a research study to better understand the role of the sport supervisor in NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics.

Given your position as a head coach at a NCAA Division I institution, I would like to invite you to participate in my study. I am requesting one interview of approximately 60 to 90 minutes. The interviews will take place at your convenience. Interviews can be conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams or a similar platform, or in-person. The audio for both the virtual and in-person interviews will be recorded for transcription purposes. Virtual session participants will be able to choose whether they wish to make their video image available for recording. If you agree to participate, please respond to this email, or contact me at 615.457.7868 to schedule a time for an interview.

Attached to this email is the unsigned consent form for your review.

Your feedback is vital to the success of this study. More importantly, your responses will be instrumental in understanding the role of the sport supervisor as a major conduit between the individual teams and the athletic administration.

If you have any questions or need further explanation, please let me know. I hope you will consider my request.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Take care,

Ehren R. Green  
Ph.D. Student  
University of Louisville



## APPENDIX D

### UNSIGNED CONSENT

#### **The Person Behind the Teams: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Role of the Sport Supervisor in NCAA Division I Intercollegiate Athletic Departments**

Date

Dear Participant:

You are being invited to participate in a research study by answering questions during an individual interview that may be conducted in-person or remotely about the role of the sport supervisor in NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics. This study is conducted by Dr. Meg Hancock and Ehren R. Green, doctoral student, at the University of Louisville. There are no known risks for your participation in this research study. The information collected may not benefit you directly. The information learned in this study may be helpful to others. The information you provide will provide an understanding of the role of the sport supervisor in NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletics. All interviews will be stored in a password protected cloud-based storage system. The interview will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes and will be audio recorded. If the interview is conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams or a similar platform, you will be able to choose whether you wish to make your video available for recording.

Individuals from the Department of Health and Human Service in the College of Education, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the Human Subjects Protection Program Office (HSPPO), and other regulatory agencies may inspect these records. In all other respects, however, the data will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Should the data be published, your identity will not be disclosed.

Taking part in this study is voluntary. By answering interview questions, you agree to take part in this research study. You do not have to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to be in this study, you may stop taking part at any time. If you decide not to be in this study or if you stop taking part at any time, you will not lose any benefits for which you may qualify.

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research study, please contact Dr. Meg Hancock at 502.852.3237 or Ehren R. Green at 615.457.7868.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may call the Human Subjects Protection Program Office at (502) 852-5188. You can discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject, in private, with a member of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). You may also call this number if you have other questions about the research, and you cannot reach the research staff, or want to talk to someone else. The IRB is an independent committee made up of people from the

University community, staff of the institutions, as well as people from the community not connected with these institutions. The IRB has reviewed this research study.

If you have concerns or complaints about the research or research staff and you do not wish to give your name, you may call 1-877-852-1167. This is a 24-hour hot line answered by people who do not work at the University of Louisville.

Sincerely,

Dr. Meg Hancock

Ehren R. Green

Ph.D. Student

University of Louisville

## CURRICULUM VITAE

Ehren R. Green

[ehren.green@louisville.edu](mailto:ehren.green@louisville.edu)

### **EDUCATION**

#### **University of Louisville**

August 2022

**Ph.D.**, Educational Leadership and Organizational  
Development

Specialization: Sport Administration

Dissertation Advisor: Dr. Meg Hancock

#### **West Virginia University**

**M.A.**, Educational Leadership Studies

2006

**M.S.**, Sport Management

2004

#### **Ball State University**

**B.S.**, Exercise Science and Wellness

2003

### **TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

#### **University of Louisville, Sport Administration Program Lecturer**

August 2021 –  
present

- Courses Taught:
  - Sport Management and Leadership (masters)
    - Teaching evaluation score - 4.76/5.00
  - Sport Management and Leadership (undergraduate)
  - Introduction to Sport Management (undergraduate)

#### **University of Louisville, Sport Administration Program Graduate Assistant**

August 2020 – July  
2021

- Courses Taught:
  - Sport Management and Leadership (masters)

- Redesigned course for 8-week format
    - Teaching evaluation score - 4.76/5.00
  - Legal Aspects of Sport (undergraduate)
- Analyzed student survey data on program recruitment initiatives.
- Completed data analysis to assist department with strategic planning.
- Edited and modified department website.

**University of Louisville, Department of Health and Sport Sciences**

Spring 2020

**Adjunct Instructor**

- Taught Sport Management and Leadership (masters)
  - Teaching evaluation score – 4.38/5.00

**University of Louisville, Department of Educational Leadership, Foundation, and Human Resource Development Graduate Assistant**

January 2020 – July 2020

- Assisted in course preparation and evaluation for LEAD 442, Supporting Organizational Change, and LEAD 605, Leadership in Human Resources and Organizational Development.
- Reviewed and edited articles for publication.
- Supported research by conducting literature searches and analyzing data.
- Created data dashboard for community partner.

**University of Tennessee Institute for Public Service, Naifeh Center for Effective Leadership**

May 2019 – November 2019

**Contract Instructional Designer and Facilitator**

- Developed, designed, and taught full day, half-day, and 2-hour courses on various leadership development topics to 50+ participants across various state agencies.

**University of Tennessee Institute for Public Service, Naifeh Center for Effective Leadership**

June 2018 – May 2019

**Training Specialist**

- Led professional development programs for 100+ mid-level and senior level leaders in various state agencies.
- Responsible for all aspects of the programs including curriculum development, logistics, budget management, and facilitation of course material.

**Temple University, University Studies** Fall 2010, Summers  
**Adjunct Lecturer** 2012, 2013

- Developed curriculum and taught both traditional student and student-athlete specific University 101 Seminar course.
- Course focused on strategies to assist students transitioning to college as well as career exploration.

**West Virginia University, College of Physical Activity and Sport Sciences** Spring 2008, 2009,  
**Adjunct Lecturer** 2010

- Created and co-taught Sport and Exercise Psychology 493L, Student-Athletes in Transition.

**West Virginia University, College of Physical Activity and Sport Sciences** Summer 2008,  
**Adjunct Lecturer** Spring & Summer  
2009

- Taught ACE 360, Techniques of Coaching Soccer.

#### **HIGHER EDUCATION LEADERSHIP**

**Belmont University College of Law** July 2016 –  
**Director of Admissions** September 2017

- Recruited 700+ applicants throughout the United States. Increased applicant pool by 34%.
- Developed and executed new marketing strategies including increased use of social media, e-marketing campaigns, and website development.
- Oversaw and maintained the Office of Admission's budget including travel, marketing, and advertising expenditures.
- Created new initiative with Tennessee Bar Association (TBA) to increase student membership and provide greater access and learning opportunities for students with members of the Nashville legal community.
- Advised 13 College of Law student organizations.

**Belmont University College of Law** July 2014 – July  
**Student Services Coordinator** 2016

- Split role between admissions and student services.
- Recruited prospective students nationally and co-led on-campus recruiting events.
- Counseled students on career strategies in individual and workshop settings.
- Developed and implemented programs on career topics such as resume writing, networking, and professionalism.

- Led the planning of multiple Continuing Legal Education (CLE) events for students and community members.
- Managed the peer mentor program comprised of 50+ students.

**Temple University, Nancy & Donald Resnick Academic Center for Student-Athletes**

August 2011 – April 2014

**Academic Advisor II**

- Advisor for men’s basketball, football and women’s soccer teams.
- Developed and implemented plans to improve academic retention, graduation rate, and overall academic success.
- Trained and supervised graduate interns and undergraduate student-workers.
- Developed and managed peer mentor program comprised of approximately 20 mentors and 50 mentees.

**Temple University, College of Education**

July 2010 – August 2011

**Academic Advisor II**

- Advised over 100 students on program and state requirements for teacher certification.
- Program coordinator for 4+1 dual certification elementary education/special education program.
- Developed and led presentations for various college recruiting events.

**West Virginia University, Department of Intercollegiate Athletics**

August 2005 – June 2010

**Graduate Assistant promoted to Program Coordinator**

- Initiated academic advising programming for women’s basketball and men’s soccer programs.
- Evaluated student-athlete records using a working knowledge of institutional and NCAA rules and regulations to ensure all NCAA eligibility standards, including progress towards degree and GPA requirements, were met.
- Compiled and analyzed data related to the NCAA Academic Progress Rate.

**James Madison University, Duke Club Development Associate**

January 2005 – July 2005

- Identified and cultivated prospective donors in Philadelphia, New York City, Washington D.C. area, and Baltimore.

**West Virginia University, Mountaineer Athletic Club  
Graduate Assistant**

August 2003 –  
October 2004

- Assisted Executive Director of Development/Assistant Athletic Director with overall athletic development program. Program comprised of 4,000 annual donors and generated \$5.6 million in fiscal year 2003. The 2004 fiscal year total exceeded \$11.5 million and doubled the previous all-time high.
- Primary contact and sales coordinator for the new 650 seat Touchdown Terrace Club Level at Mountaineer Field opened in Fall 2004. Club seats generated \$500,000 in new revenue for the WVU Department of Intercollegiate Athletics.

**PRIVATE SECTOR EXPERIENCE**

**HCA Healthcare (contract assignment through North Highland)  
Program Coordinator**

October 2017 –  
June 2018

- Member of leadership development team for the Integrated Lines of Business Organizational Development unit.
- Assisted with leadership development programs for senior and mid-level leaders.
- Conducted analysis of talent management data.

**RESEARCH**

**Research Interest**

The intersection of intercollegiate athletics, leadership, and organizational behavior. My research aims to provide organizational strategies and solutions for leaders in intercollegiate athletics.

**Peer-Reviewed Articles (including works in progress)**

**Green, E.R.**, Rose, K., Damon, Z., & Hancock, M. (In Progress) Organizational change in sport: An integrative literature review.

Siegfried, N., **Green, E. R.**, Swim, N., Montanaro, A., Greenwell, T. C., & Frederick, E. (2021). An examination of college adaptive sport sponsorship and the role of cause-related marketing. *Journal of Issues in Intercollegiate Athletics*.

Swim, N., **Green, E. R.**, Hums, M., Bower, G., & Walker, K. (2022) Is same-gender mentorship important for female student-athletes?: An application of the mentor role theory. *Journal of Athlete Development and Experience*

Bergman, M., Herd, A.M., & **Green, E.R.** (2020). The use of prior learning assessment for enhanced military-to-civilian transition outcomes. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 166, 37-50. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.20382>

McCart, A., Bergman, M., Rose, K., & **Green, E.R.** (In Press) Organizational supports and developing a healthy workforce: A case study of wellness factors and leadership. *International Journal of Information Communication Technologies and Human Development*, 14(2).

Mires, E., Bergman, M., Rose, K., & **Green, E.R.** (In Press). Defining the presence of misrecognition in multilingual organizations. *International Journal of Information Communication Technologies and Human Development*, 14(1).

### **Conference Presentations**

Swim, N., **Green, E. R.**, Hums, M., Bower, G., & Walker, K. (2022, March). Is same-gender mentorship important for female student-athletes?: An application of the mentor role theory. CSRI Conference 2022.

Siegfried, N., **Green, E.R.**, Swim, N., Montanaro, A., Greenwell, C. (Advisor). (2021, May). An examination of college adaptive sport sponsorship assts and the role of cause-related marketing. NASSM Conference 2021.

Gray, E., Farr, J.R., **Green, E.R.**, Hindman, L.C., Bodin, K, Ryder, A., Patil, S., Teare, G. (2021, May). An anti-racist classroom: Teaching strategies across the curriculum. NASSM Conference 2021.

**Green, E.R.**, Hancock, M.G., Shuck, M.B., Coco, A. (2021, March). A quantitative analysis of the organizational culture of an NCAA Division I intercollegiate athletic department. Spring Research Conference. University of Louisville, Louisville, KY.

Montanaro, A., Siegfried, N., Swim, N., **Green, E.R.**, Greenwell, T.C. (Advisor). (2021, March). A quantitative examination of college adaptive sport sponsorship assts and the role of cause-related marketing. Spring Research Conference. University of Louisville, Louisville, KY.

**Green, E.R.** & Rose, K. (2021, February). Organizational Change in Sport Management. Academy of Human Resource Development. Virtual.

Swim, N., Montanaro, A., **Green, E.R.** (2021, February). An examination of state high school associations concussion protocols: Investigating consistent inconsistencies. Sport Recreation and Law Association. Virtual.



**Green, E.R.** (2020, March). Authentic Leadership in Intercollegiate Athletics Recruiting: Retaining Student-Athletes. Spring Research Conference. University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH.

**Green, E.R.** (2020, February). Authentic Leadership in Intercollegiate Athletics Recruiting: Retaining Student-Athletes. Graduate Student Regional Research Conference. University of Louisville, Louisville, KY.

**Green, E.R.** (2019, March). Maximizing Productivity: Getting Our Priorities Straight. Facilitated workshop at the Tennessee Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators Annual Conference, Murfreesboro, TN – Invited Speaker

**Invited Speaking Engagements**

November 2020, March 2021                      University of Louisville Athletics Student-Athlete Development: Branded a Leader Workshop

**SERVICE**

**University Service**

Belmont University                      Vision 2020 Strategic Planning Athletics Sub-Committee  
Admissions Committee

**Department/Institute Service**

University of Tennessee                      Strategic Planning Budget Sub-Committee  
Institute for Public                      TIE Committee  
Service                      Internal Feedback Committee  
Search Committee Chair for Training Specialist

Belmont University                      Hiring manager for two admissions department personnel  
2020 Strategic Planning Athletics Sub-Committee

West Virginia University                      Academic Integrity Committee for Athletic Recertification  
Process  
Academic Improvement Committee for Athletics -  
Women’s Basketball Representative  
Big East Conference Annual Meeting Representative

Ball State University                      Athletic Director Search Committee – Student-Athlete  
Representative

**Community Service**

2020 – 2022                      Board President, Project Brickworks

2020-2021 Academic year	Louisville Collegiate School Grade Level Parent
2020-2021 Season	Head Coach, Mockingbird Valley Premier Soccer Club, U8 boys
2019-2020 Academic year	Louisville Collegiate School Grade Level Parent
2018-19 Season	Team Manager, Nashville United Soccer Association, U9 & U10 boys
2017-2018	Board Member, McKendree UMC Daycare
Fall 2017	Volunteer Coach, Nashville United Soccer Association, U7 & U8 boys
2006-07 Season	Head Coach, West Virginia United Soccer Club, U16 girls

## **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **Memberships**

2020 – present	North American Society for Sport Management Elected Student Board Member – Strategic Initiatives (2020-21)
2020 – present	COSMA Elected Student Board Member

### **Certifications**

Fall 2019	DelphiU On-line Learning Certificate
Spring 2019	TalentSmart Emotional Intelligence Certified Trainer
Fall 2018	ATD Instructional Design Certificate
Summer 2014	Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) Certified Practitioner

### **HONORS AND AWARDS**

Summer 2016	Women Leaders in College Sports (formerly NACWAA) Institute for Administrative Advancement
2013-14	Selected for Temple University Management Academy