

Existential Coaching Education: A Pedagogical Pathway to Alleviate Anxiety and Increase
Coping Skills of Collegiate Female Swimmers

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Abstract

Division I athletes are consistently exposed to daily stressors and how to cope with increased anxiety and depression. The win-at-all-costs nature of elite-level athletics produces an environment focused on performance rather than the person, increasing levels of stress and anxiety. The creation of a twelve-week systematic coaching intervention based on an existential philosophical framework focusing on the subjective lived experience of athletes was designed to assist female Division I swimmers with a phenomenological reduction aimed at alleviating trait anxiety and increasing athletic coping skills.

The purpose of this quasi-experimental study was to examine the effect of a twelve-week systematic coaching education program on the mental health and well-being of female athletes as measured by levels of trait anxiety and athletic coping skills.

The quasi-experimental design was a two-group pre/posttest design. Participants were NCAA female swimmers. Treatment group (n=23) and the control group (n=27) completed pre and posttests using the SAS-2 (trait anxiety) and ACSI-28 (coping skills). The treatment group received twelve reflection modules consisting of readings, discussions, and journaling. Researchers have argued that phenomenology can be utilized as a methodology to better understand the subjective experience of athletes (Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2010; Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2015; Breivik, 2013; Burton et. al, 2006; Cronin & Armour, 2015; Dale, 1996; Hockey & Collinson, 2007; Hughson & Inglis, 2002; James, 2017; Purser, 2018; Wacquant, 2004; Wharton, 2004). Utilizing phenomenology as the philosophical foundation, the construction of this intentional coaching pedagogy was based on Gill's theoretical approach to learning (1993); Garrison's reliance on passion, intuition, and vulnerability (1997); Lickona's emphasis on role-modeling and storytelling (1991); and the ability to ask the correct questions to lead athletes to a be understanding of their personal experience in sport (Reimer et. al, 1983; Stoll, Beller, & Hahm, 2004). Most importantly, the intentional coaching pedagogy was constructed on a philosophical basis of Husserl's phenomenological reduction (Husserl, 1962, 1975), Merleau-Ponty's postulate of body-subject (1962, 1964) and Heidegger's notion of authentic existence (1953, 1996). In all, the treatment group wrote close to 188 pages of phenomenological reflections totaling approximately to 100,000 words of first-person reductions of their subjective lived experiences.

A significant difference was found with the interaction of Time X Group on trait anxiety scores Wilk's Lambda $F(1, 48) = 8.39, p < .034$, partial $\eta^2 = .09$. Treatment group trait anxiety scores decreased from a pretest score of 35.0 ± 1.7 to posttest score of 30.8 ± 1.6 , while control group trait anxiety scores remained the same from pretest 35.2 ± 1.6 to posttest 34.6 ± 1.5 . No significant difference was found with the interaction of Time X Group on coping skills Wilk's Lambda $F(1, 48) = 5.76, p < .056$, partial $\eta^2 = .074$. Treatment group scores approached significance, increasing from a pretest score of 70.5 ± 2.4 to a posttest score of 75.6 ± 2.3 . Control group scores remained the same from pretest 69.7 ± 2.2 to posttest 70.2 ± 2.5 . An exploratory analysis showed that the curriculum had an impact on new incoming swimmers on coping skills (pre = 69.3 ± 3.3 ; post = 77.1 ± 3.2) and trait anxiety (pre = 38.0 ± 2.3 ; post = 31.2 ± 2.2).

This pedagogical study shows promise that a twelve-week systematic coaching intervention can positively reduce anxiety and increase athletic coping skills in female swimmers and perhaps has a strong influence on new incoming swimmers.

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Dedication

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Prologue

This project took years to come to fruition not because of the research, but because the problem, while in front of my face daily, was elusive and difficult to define. As a career NCAA Division I swimming coach, I stood witness to rising levels of anxiety and depression among the athletes with whom I worked. When I first began my doctoral study, I believed that the problem stemmed from immoral and unethical athletic departments that placed importance on winning at all costs and the carnage left behind were the athletes. Eventually I came to believe a mental health crisis existed in collegiate athletics due to athletes being treated like commodities instead of people. While the problem had systemic causes and mental health was certainly eroding at alarming rates, my close reading of the phenomenological texts of Edmund Husserl (1962, 1975) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1964), along with the existentialists Martin Heidegger (1953, 1996) and Jean-Paul Sarte (1956) illuminated a pathway I had not yet seen. Certainly, our athletes were struggling, but their struggle was not only psychological it was ontological. Their sport was threatening their very *Being* and the only way to alleviate this threat was through a different approach to coaching. Rather than devoting all training on motor development, time needed to be spent on existential development. Athletes needed to be heard, valued, appreciated, and loved. The method that needed to be developed was a phenomenological journey which allowed athletes to rediscover the love for the sport that now caused so much pain and anguish. This dissertation is the story of the methodology that helped a swim team navigate one of the most stressful seasons of their lives, the fall of 2020 amid the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chapter One: The Problem

Overview¹

Merleau-Ponty sought to explain *Being* through his understanding of pure perception or simply the lived experience (Merleau-Ponty, 1964). Being present in the experience, the subject becomes not just part of the experience but really the experience itself. One cannot be without the other. Thus, the individual becomes both the subject and the object of the experience. While one is performing a movement activity whether it is organized play, recreation, or formalized athletics, the subject must be “in the moment,” and therefore the moment also becomes the subject. Only before and after the activity does rational thought and reflection occur, as the subject stands separate from the experience itself. Merleau-Ponty views subjective reflection as essential to the essence of an experience beyond empirical observation or sense data. For Merleau-Ponty, “[w]ithout reflection life would probably dissipate itself in ignorance or in chaos” (1964, p. 67).

...[T]o see an essence one must first begin by having a perception, which serves as the base, or the point of departure... but not as the source of validity.

...[P]erception, that is, serves as the ground or the pedestal, onto which the insight into essence is found (1964, p. 68).

Here, Merleau-Ponty is quoting Husserl (1962).² Yet he takes Husserl further by explaining that this insight into the perception of the experience is that “taking over” or the enveloping of the object. The term enveloping is quite telling because if one envelops something, the thing becomes part of the subject. The perception is not the experience but the understanding or the intuition of the essence of the experience.

Seeing perception as the “ground” or point of departure for the true essence of the experience can directly relate to the collegiate swimmer through the water in which she moves. When a swimmer is in the act of swimming, she cannot necessarily be removed from the water or else the act of swimming can no longer be considering swimming. The water, as

¹ The following dissertation will be written in MS Word, following format from APA Sixth Edition.

² Edmund Husserl is considered to be the father of Phenomenology. A mathematician by trade he developed the nexus of this theory of Phenomenology at the Victorian Crystal Palace scientific congress in which scientists argued that all could be known through empiricism and rationalism. Husserl’s text, *Ideas* (1962), is considered the beginning of the phenomenological movement.

the other, is the subject of the experience. The swimmer constantly perceives the medium in which she moves but ultimately has to envelope the water even while the water is literally enveloping her. The swimmer moves as both subject and object as the water she moves through is both object and now subject. They meet each other in almost a sensual exchange. In fact, the more a swimmer attempts to power her way through the pool the more the pool fights her with resistance. Only when she allows herself to move fluidly through the water does the water aid her, support her, and move her.

The act of floating in water further explains this symbiotic relationship. Floating is both an active and passive experience. When she floats, she must discover the balance point within her body where she must apply pressure to remain on the surface of the water. Paradoxically, floating is also a passive activity. The swimmer gives herself to the water. She allows the water to support her in almost an embrace. The more she struggles, the quicker she will sink. She must trust that the water is there for her. She must believe that the water will forever be there, eventually she no longer must think about floating. Floating becomes the experience, becomes the movement, and once again becomes part of the subject. The water, which was once the departure point for the experience, fades into the trust, abandonment, and activity of swimming.

One may not expect coaches to become deep readers of philosophy. Yet the entire history of physical education is deeply rooted in philosophy, dating back to as early as Plato.

Plato's dream of education's potential was the development of a citizen—a man of character—and all the elements of his education fed into the growth of the whole man (as modern educators have come to term him). Sports and games, rhythmic activities, literature, and music were all activities suited to a man of character because they helped him develop harmony of spirit (Gerber, 1971, pp. 9-10).

Yet we can, and often do, expect coaches to have the best interest of their athletes at the core of their methodology and pedagogical approach. If coaches fail to understand the true essence of the athlete's experience in the water, on the court, the field, the ice, or track, they fail to understand truly the athlete's existential condition of *Being* in the sport. This failure not only creates a deep chasm between the coach and athlete but additionally alienates the athlete from the sport she once loved. Therefore, a fundamental need exists for an existential

coaching education aimed at affecting the mental, physical, and ontological well-being of elite athletes.³

Collegiate coaches are often not trained pedagogists. Instead, coaches at the highest level are indoctrinated into a culture that is judged primarily on performance and not well-being. Once part of the educational mission of institutions of higher learning, NCAA athletics and its coaches seemed to have lost the connection to the true essence of the experience of sport and have become handcuffed by realistic performance and outcome goals. Sport philosopher Carolyn Thomas (1983) views competition on any level as a means for self-discovery.

Any of our thoughts, feelings, or reflections about ourselves and others in the competitive situation have the potential to direct us toward a more personal understanding of ourselves, our motivations, and our behavior. While not always possible to put these knowledges in a rational, orderly model that is transmitted to others in words, we still “know” from our experience in sport a little more about the hidden and blind parts of the self (Thomas, 1983, p. 143).

Modern day coaches are focused primarily on the development of the body, motor skills, aerobic conditioning, power, and strength. This realistic pedagogy dismisses the “hidden and blind parts of the self,” described by Thomas, and instead views the athlete as a body in motion. Marxist philosopher Gibson explains “...[t]he failure to recognize that sport is worthwhile in itself, has allowed the capitalistic spirit to use sport as yet another means to the end of capital accumulation” (Gibson, 1993, p. 38). Gibson argues that the commodification of athletes reflects the capitalistic underpinnings of American society. Yet these athletes are people and not commodities to be traded. When young athletes become a means to an end, the true essence of the experience described by Merleau-Ponty (1964) is warped with dire consequences.

Most of college athletics is: “Can he run, can he jump, can he shoot?” says TCU athletic director Chris Del Conte. “And the whole part of the kid is lost. What do you do with the whole of the kid, with those with eating disorders,

³ For a contemporary example of the alienating aspect of elite college athletics and the tragic results, see Kate Fagan’s *What Made Maddy Run* (2017) which details the suicide of a University of Pennsylvania freshman track athlete. For an excellent account of the history of Physical Education see Ellen Gerber’s *Innovators and Institutions in Physical Education* (1971) which illustrates that physical education once had a deeply philosophical and ontological mission that has changed in contemporary elite athletics.

with the cutters? It's amazing that coaches are not prepared to deal with this stuff...[I] know performance is the greatest thing you are looking for, but here's what we need to do to get there. Some of our coaches get it already.

Other coaches [,] it's foreign to them (as quoted in Fagan, 2017, p. 90).

Early research into mental health of student athletes showed that rates of depression and anxiety while alarming, were in fact lower than that of the nonathlete student populations (Sudano & Miles, 2017; NCAA, 2014). However, recent studies illustrate an alarming trend in growing rates of depression among Division I student athletes (Cox, Ross-Stewart & Foltz, 2017). Cox et al., using a sample of 950 Division I athletes, found that 33.2% experienced symptoms of depression, 25.7 % did not know how to access mental health resources, and a staggering 44.5% received no mental health education from their athletic department (Cox et al., 2017). These results seemed to contradict the 2014 NCAA research into the mental health and wellness. Furthermore, Cox et al. found that female athletes experienced feelings of depression more than males with factors ranging from scholarship status, fear of failure, pressure to perform, physical demands of the season, and injury concerns as causal relationships. Cox et al. concluded that

[T]he high prevalence rate observed in this study indicates that depression is a more significant issue in college athletics than previously acknowledged...

[t]he low rate of diagnosed depression in the past 6 months also indicate a potential reluctance to seek treatment (p. 25).

Presenting at the "Mental Health in Student Athletes" panel at the College of Holy Cross in March of 2017, Whitehead and Senecal (2020) concluded that the realistic performance-centric approach to elite athletics is detrimental to the overall health of student athletes (Whitehead & Senecal, 2020). Furthermore, Whitehead and Senecal believed that the win-at-all cost price of elite collegiate athletics presented an existential problem for these athletes. The researchers suggested a balanced approach to collegiate athletics focusing on the athlete's quality of life.

For the past decade, researchers have examined the mental health of collegiate athletes in hopes of expanding resources, education, and access for athletes who were struggling with mental health concerns. Furthermore, NCAA Division I athletes have lobbied legislatures, initiated court proceedings, and protested improper sensitivity to racial

issues, all in an attempt to gain the autonomy and respect allowed them as high performing individuals generating revenue and prestige for institutions of higher learning across the NCAA landscape (Hosick, 2021). Simply, NCAA Division I athletes can no longer be viewed as commodities. Perhaps a new systematic methodology to coaching based on the ontological, epistemological, and ethical framework of twentieth century phenomenologists like Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1964), Heidegger (1953, 1996), and Husserl (1962, 1975); the developmental psychology of Kohlberg (1981), and educational pedagogists like Gill (1993), Lickona (1993), Garrison (1997), and Stoll & Beller (1998), needs to be instituted in order to rehumanize elite level athletics. This approach to intentional coaching has educational, moral, and social value and looks to bring the developing athlete back to her initial lived experience in sport. By its very ontological and epistemological stance, this existential coaching educational program aims to alleviate trait anxiety, build coping skills, and increase the well-being of collegiate athletes. This systematic coaching gives voice to the voiceless, and increase feelings of autonomy, competency, and relatedness (Burton & Raeddeke, 2008). Ultimately, coaches need better education on ways to assist athletes with their own subjective and unique experience of *being* in sport—and move from the realistic outcome-based approach.

Setting the problem

Acknowledging that “college is already an at-risk period for the development of depression symptoms” (Cox et al., 2017, p. 14), Division I athletes are exposed to additional daily stressors increasing the likelihood of anxiety and depression. The realistic outcome-oriented nature of elite level athletics produces an environment focused on performance rather than person. The creation of a twelve-week systematic coaching intervention based on the philosophical framework of the embodied subjective experience of the athlete may decrease levels of trait anxiety and increase the coping skills of female NCAA Division I swimmers. Extensive research exists, illustrating that systematic, thoughtful, educational interventions appear to increase the levels of moral reasoning in athletes (Stoll & Beller, 1998; Stoll, Beller & Hahm, 2004). Additionally, Peter VanMullen developed a coaching education intervention to improve moral reasoning of basketball coaches (VanMullen, 2009). Kevin Bryant created an intervention for athletic directors meant to increase levels of moral knowing (Bryant, Stoll & Beller, 2018). Most recently, a study by Aubrey Shaw suggested

that an intervention with physical education students could increase perspective taking (Shaw, 2020). To this point, no intervention designed to equip coaches exists to assist their athletes in a journey back to their initial lived subjective experience in her sport. This twelve-week approach to intentional coaching based on epistemological pedagogical methodology by such educators as Jerry Gill (1993), Thomas Lickona (1991), Jim Garrison (1997), Sharon Stoll and Jennifer Beller (1998) and past coaching educational interventions (Bryant et. al, 2018; VanMullen, 2009) should enable collegiate coaches to affect the overall health and well-being of athletes. Attention is also be given to use cognitive development theory in the intervention's design based on the work of Lawrence Kohlberg (1981) and later Joseph Reimer, Diana Pritchard Paolitto and Richard Hersh (1983) plus other professionals Thomas Piper, Mary Gentile, and Sharon Daloz Parks (1998). Finally the philosophical framework to the twelve-week intervention relies on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's ontological description of embodied knowing as the essence of the subjective lived experience in the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 1964).

This intentional coaching intervention approaches a psychological problem of anxiety and coping skills from a philosophical perspective. Quantitative data was collected utilizing two different valid and reliable instruments in a pre and posttest. The first instrument is the Sport Anxiety Scale-2 (SAS-2)⁴ developed by Smith, Cummings, and Smoll (2006). The SAS-2 measures the level of trait anxiety in the tested athlete. The second instrument utilized in the pre and posttest was the Athletic Coping Skills Inventory-28 (ACSI-28)⁵ developed by Smith, Smoll, Schultz & Ptacek (1995). The ACSI-28 evaluated seven different coping subscales in the tested athlete.⁶

⁴ The SAS-2 can be found in Appendix G.

⁵ The ACSI-28 can be found in Appendix H.

⁶ A systematic observation of coaching behavior was planned to be conducted and validated for all three coaches involved in this study. This observation of coaching styles was meant to verify that the control groups' coaches are using a standardized realistic performance-based coaching methodology compared to the methodology of the treatment group which is based on the ontological condition of the athlete. The observation would have had an objective measure of time spent on four different coaching interactions with athletes. The categories of observation are: 1) practice management 2) motor skill/technical instruction 3) monitoring of training speeds and 4) reinforcement. Unfortunately, due to Covid-19 restrictions, this part of the study was tabled.

Problem Statement⁷

The purpose of this quasi-experimental study using a pretest/posttest four group design, was to examine the effect of a twelve-week systematic intentional coaching education with an epistemological existential methodology on the mental health and well-being of athletes as measured by levels of trait anxiety and athletic coping skills.

A convenience experimental sample of twenty-eight female collegiate swimmers at a Division I mid-major university located in the Northwest was gathered and a pretest and posttest was employed. A control group comprised of female swimmers at two different northwestern universities was also be used. (1) Trait anxiety was measured by the Sport Anxiety Scale-2 (SAS-2) (Smith, Cummings, & Smoll, 2006). (2) Athletic coping skills was measured by the Athletic Coping Skills Inventory-28 (ACSI-28) (Smith, Smoll, Schultz & Ptacek, 1995).⁸

Sub-Problems⁹

Sub-problems

Trait Anxiety

- TA1. What difference exists pre to posttest between experimental group one and experimental group two in levels of trait anxiety among Division I female swimmers?
- TA2. What difference exists pre to posttest between experimental one and control group one in levels of trait anxiety among Division I female swimmers?
- TA3. What difference exists pre to posttest between experimental group one and control group two in levels of trait anxiety among Division I female swimmers?
- TA4. What difference exists pre to posttest between experimental group two and control group one in levels of trait anxiety among Division I female swimmers?

⁷ The original problem statement approved by the dissertation committee is stated here. After the completion of the intervention and prior to running the data on SPSS, the principal researcher and members of the committee agreed to change the design to a two group pre/posttest design due to a number of factors. This decision will be explained in detail in Chapter Four as well as restating the problem statement.

⁸ A systematic observation of coaching behavior was planned for both experimental groups and both control groups. The observation would have examined time devoted to coaching four objective and measurable categories of a) practice management b) motor skill/technical instruction c) monitoring of training speeds d) reinforcement. This systematic observation would have been conducted during the course of a typical swimming training session so that a comparison could be drawn between the realistic performance-based coaching styles of the control groups and that of the existential epistemology of the treatment coaching. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions at various universities, this portion of the experiment was tabled.

⁹ These are the original sub-problems based on the four-group design approved by the dissertation committee. New sub-problems based on a two-group design will be restated in Chapter Four.

TA5. What difference exists pre to posttest between experimental group two and control group two in levels of trait anxiety among Division I female swimmers?

TA6. What difference exists pre to posttest between control group one and control group two in levels of trait anxiety among Division I female swimmers?

TA7. What difference exists pre to posttest between combined experimental group and combined control group in levels of trait anxiety among Division I female swimmers?

Athletic Coping Skills

CS8. What difference exists pre to posttest between experimental group one and experimental group two in athletic coping skills among Division I female swimmers?

CS9. What difference exists pre to posttest between experimental group one and control group one in athletic coping skills among Division I female swimmers?

CS10. What difference exists pre to posttest between experimental group one and control group two in athletic coping skills among Division I female swimmers?

CS11. What difference exists pre to posttest between experimental group two and control group one in athletic coping skills among Division I female swimmers?

CS12. What difference exists pre to posttest between experimental group two and control group two in athletic coping skills among Division I female swimmers?

CS13. What difference exists pre to posttest between control group one and control group two in athletic coping skills among Division I female swimmers?

CS14. What difference exists pre to posttest between combined experimental group and combined control group in athletic coping skills among Division I female swimmers?¹⁰

Statistical hypotheses¹¹

Trait Anxiety

TAHo1. No difference exists pre to posttest between experimental group one and experimental group two in levels of trait anxiety among Division I female swimmers.

TAHo2. No difference exists pre to posttest between experimental one and control group one in levels of trait anxiety among Division I female swimmers.

¹⁰ Due to COVID-19 restrictions the systematic coaching observation was tabled for this experiment. For a description of the sub-problems, see Appendix E.

¹¹ These are the original statistical hypotheses based on the approved four group design. New hypotheses based on the amended two group design will be restated and addressed in Chapter Four.

TAHo3. No difference exists pre to posttest between experimental group one and control group two in levels of trait anxiety among Division I female swimmers.

TAHo4. No difference exists pre to posttest between experimental group two and control group one in levels of trait anxiety among Division I female swimmers.

TAHo5. No difference exists pre to posttest between experimental group two and control group two in levels of trait anxiety of Division I female swimmers.

TAHo6. No difference exists pre to posttest between control group one and control group two in levels of trait anxiety among Division I female swimmers.

TAHo7. No difference exists pre to posttest between the combined experimental group and the combined controls group in levels of trait anxiety among Division I female swimmers.

Athletic Coping Skills

CSHo8. No difference exists pre to posttest between experimental group one and experimental group two in athletic coping skills among Division I female swimmers.

CSHo9. No difference exists pre to posttest between experimental group one and control group one in athletic coping skills among Division I female swimmers.

CSHo10. No difference exists pre to posttest between experimental group one and control group two in athletic coping skills among Division I female swimmers.

CSHo11. No difference exists pre to posttest between experimental group two and control group one in athletic coping skills among Division I female swimmers.

CSHo12. No difference exists pre to posttest between experimental group two and control group two in athletic coping skills among Division I female swimmers.

CSHo13. No difference exists pre to posttest between control group one and control group two in athletic coping skills among Division I female swimmers.

CSHo14. No difference exists pre to posttest between the combined experimental group and the combined control group in athletic coping skills among Division I female swimmers.¹²

Delimitations

This study is delimited to:

¹² Statistical hypothesis for coaching observation is located in Appendix E.

1. One female NCAA Division I, mid-major, swimming team, 28 total swimmers comprising the two experimental groups.
2. Thirteen freshmen, two sophomore transfer students (first year in program) are newcomers to the program.
3. Nine sophomores, three juniors, one senior had previous experience with coach/researcher.
4. All athletes reside currently in the Pacific Northwest.
5. The experimental group has an average of ten years competitive swimming experience.
6. Control group one is a female NCAA Division I swimming team in an elite Power Five athletic conference.
7. Control Group two is a female NCAA Division I swimming team in a mid-major conference.
8. All athletes were recruited to compete at the NCAA Division I level.
9. The two instruments measured (1) trait sport anxiety as measured by the Sport Anxiety Scale -2 (Smith, Cummings, & Smoll, 2006), (2) athletic coping skills as measured by Athletic Coping Skills Inventory-28 (ACSI-28) (Smith, Smoll, Schultz & Ptacek, 1995).
10. The intervention consisted of twelve, one week, topic driven modules where discussions, story telling, reading, small group activities, and written reflection occurred.
11. Each week all 28 participants received feedback and comments on their reflection from their coach/ researcher.
12. This intervention occurred at the beginning the second week of the competitive swimming season (August, 2020) and concluded the week of mid-season meet (December, 2020).
13. This study's experiemental groups are delimited to one women's swimming team and a small/medium size landgrant university in the Pacific Northwest.
14. This study's control groups are delimited to Division I swimming teams located in the western U.S.
15. This study occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic (August-December, 2020).
16. This study is delimited to the curriculum designed to promote subjective reflection on one's lived experience in elite athletics.

Limitations

1. Participants for the study are a convenience sample.
2. Experimental participants for the study were recruited to the team by coach/researcher.
3. The participants understand the research instruments as they were designed and intended.
4. Some participants have spent multiple years already within the program.
5. Generalizability of the data gathered is limited to the team involved.
6. The results of the data are limited to the reliability and validity of the Sport Anxiety Scale-2 and the Athletic Coping Skills Inventory-28.
7. The added variable of COVID-19 may have affected levels of anxiety and coping.
8. Only female identified athletes were evaluated.
9. Only the sport of swimming was evaluated.
10. The researcher/coach is inherently biased.
11. Some participants may have attempted to please researcher/coach with responses.

Assumptions

1. The 28 female Division I swimmers are a representative sample of typical mid-major NCAA Division I swimming team.
2. The two testing instruments are appropriate for the target population of collegiate athletes and are a reliable and valid measure of (1) trait anxiety in sport as measured by the Sport Anxiety Scale-2 (Smith, Cummings, & Smoll, 2006), (2) athletic coping skills as measured by Athletic Coping Skills Inventory-28 (ACSI-28) (Smith, Smoll, Schultz & Ptacek, 1995).
3. The researcher sampled all participants utilizing the same research methods.
4. The members of the swimming team fully participated in the intervention as intended and reflected on her own subjective lived experience each week.
5. The control groups completed the pre and posttest as intended.
6. The researcher/coach gave the same level of feedback on each participant's weekly reflection.
7. The participants understood all directions as intended.
8. All 28 participants knowingly entered the intervention willingly and did not feel compelled by coach/researcher.

9. When participating in the intervention the swimmers knew the study's goal was to get them to reflect on the many lived experiences in their sport of swimming.
10. The participants completed the pre and posttests to the best of their ability.
11. The participants remained relatively healthy and were able to participate physically in their sport at a similar level.

Operational Definitions

The definitions found within this section are meant to give the readers a better understanding of the material being presented.

Athletic Coping Skills: The ability and capacity of an athlete to deal with stress, arousal, anxiety, competition, perceived pressure, and levels of confidence in a sporting experience.

Athletic Coping Skills Inventory-28 (ACSI-28): The ACSI-28 is a twenty-eight-item inventory that contains seven sport-specific subscales: coping with adversity, peaking under pressure, goal setting/mental preparation, concentration, freedom from worry, confidence, and achievement motivation, and coachability. The seven scales are summed to produce a Personal Coping Resources score, yielding a multifaceted psychological skills construct.

Autonomy: The experience of being in control and having the freedom and ability to determine one's actions and behaviors.

Being: Both the authentic existence of an individual and the essence of the individual within a unique subjective experience.

Coach: A person who is responsible for the direction, education, performance, and environment of an athletic team.

Cognitive Dissidence: A feeling of disequilibrium created when someone is challenged to rethink beliefs or values often leading to moral growth and cognitive development.

Community: A collection of liked-minded individuals who share similar values, experiences, and goals.

Competence: The feeling of being talented or skilled at a task or activity.

Competitor: An athlete who chooses to enter a contest with the goal of achieving at the highest possible level.

Control: The feeling that the individual has the freedom and ability to decide the best course of action in a certain athletic task.

Embodiment: "...[d]escribes one fundamental condition of personhood, namely, that humans are always located somewhere and sometime and that human consciousness is never free from the influence of body constraints like chemicals and the number of brain cells in one's head (Kretchmar, 1994, p. 33).

Existential: The "irreducibility" of the personal, subjective dimension of human life. The condition that is uniquely human and derived from the critical humanistic need to establish an understanding of one own's ontological position in existence (Baldwin, 1995, p. 257).

Extrinsic motivation: Engaging in behaviors in order to attain contingent outcomes beyond the activity itself (Burton & Raedeke, 2008).

Division I: Member institutions within the NCAA that offer student athletes scholarship money and usually operate with large athletic department budgets, compete at the highest level, and have the opportunity to generate substantial revenue in sports like football and men's basketball (NCAA, 2019).

Essence: A universal or common truth in a subjective experience that is essential to the core of that experience and not dependent on the individual interpretation.

Flow: A state of optimal experience "...[i]n which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great costs, for the sheer sake of doing it" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 4).

Intrinsic motivation: Engaging in an activity for its own sake, particularly the pleasure and satisfaction derived from playing (Burton & Raedeke, 2008).

Mastery: When levels of competency of a skill reach a level of highest possible dexterity and achievement where one can be confident that she can repeat the necessary skill automatically without overthinking.

NCAA: National Collegiate Athletic Association. A governing body made up of all member institutions of higher learning that sponsor interscholastic athletics. The NCAA is comprised of three divisions. Division I schools offer athletic scholarships and tend to have the largest athletic budgets and revenue generation. Division II programs offer some athletic scholarships but have much smaller budgets and seldom generate revenue. Division III programs offer no athletic scholarships and tend to view athletics as participatory. These schools are usually smaller and more academically focused (NCAA, 2019).

Play: "...[a] voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having an aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy, and the consciousness that it is different from ordinary life" (Huizinga, 1950, p. 28).

Relatedness: The feeling of connecting with others.

Relationship: The interaction between teammates, coaches, sport, environment, aesthetic, and the overall lived experience.

Reflection: "[T]he process of making careful judgments or observations based on a clear understanding of moral and nonmoral values" (Lumpkin, Stoll, & Beller, 2003, p. 268).

Responsibility: "[T]he moral value in which one is answerable, accountable, and possibly liable for actions in the past, present, and future; a statement of character that one is trustworthy to carry out deeds" (Lumpkin, Stoll, & Beller, 2003, pp. 268-269).

Phenomenology: "[P]henomenology is best understood as a radical, anti-traditional style of philosophizing, which emphasizes the attempt to get to the truth of matters, to describe *phenomena*, in the broadest sense as whatever appears in the manner in which it appears, that as it manifests itself to consciousness, to the experiencer. As such, phenomenology's first step is to avoid all misconstructions and impositions placed on experience in advance, whether these are drawn from religious or cultural traditions, from everyday common sense, or, indeed, from science itself. Explanations are not to be imposed before the phenomena have been understood from within" (Moran, 2000, p. 4).

Sport Anxiety Scale-2 (SAS-2): In 1990, Smith, Smoll, and Schultz saw a need to develop an instrument to measure levels of trait anxiety in a sport setting. The Sport Anxiety Scale (SAS) addresses this need for a multidimensional measure (Smith et al., 1990) which was retooled again as the (SAS-2) in 2006-- the instrument used within this coaching intervention (Smith et al., 2006).

Sport Enjoyment: A positive affective response to the sport experience that reflects generalized feelings of pleasure, liking, or fun.

Student-Athlete: "[A] student-athlete is a student whose enrollment was solicited by a member of the athletics staff or other representative of athletics interest with a view toward the student's ultimate participation in the intercollegiate athletics program. Any other student becomes a student-athlete only when the student reports for an intercollegiate squad

that is under the jurisdiction of the athletics department, as specified in Constitution 3.2.4.5. A student is not deemed a student-athlete solely on the basis of prior high school athletics participation (NCAA, 2019, p. 34).

Trait Anxiety: The general disposition or tendency to perceive situations as threatening and to react with an anxiety response (Williams, 2010, p. 515).

Value: Individual relative worth placed on some intrinsic or extrinsic object, experience, or persons (Lumpkin, Stoll, & Beller, 2003, p. 269).

Significance of the study

Athletes: This study is significant to women swimmers because a paradigm shift will occur from a performance-based focus to one that focuses on the mental health and well-being of the individual. This study has the potential to alleviate levels of trait anxiety, increase athletic coping skills, and increase the overall enjoyment of the sporting experience. Most importantly, this study hoped to rehumanize collegiate athletics and move beyond the commodification of our young athletes.

Coaching Professionals: This study is significant for coaches because if anxiety is alleviated and athletic coping skills increased, athletes will be healthier and perform better (Creswell & Hodge, 2004).

The Coaching Profession: This study is significant to the coaching profession because it offers coaches an educational approach that will protect the mental health and well-being of the athletes with whom they work. Additionally, coaches should gain a better understanding of the subjective experience of athletes which may enable coaches to effectively design a training unique to the individual on a mental, physical, emotional, and ontological level.

The Athletic Community: This study has the potential to illustrate the importance of athletics in the overall lived experience of individuals. The reflective nature of the twelve-week intervention should give a voice back to the athlete but should also give coaches skills to better assist these athletes in a healthier manner.¹³

¹³ For IRB approval see Chapter Three methodology section or Appendix A.

Chapter Two: Review of Related Literature

Problem Statement¹⁴

The purpose of this quasi-experimental study using a pretest/posttest four group design, is to examine the effect of a twelve-week systematic intentional coaching education with an epistemological existential methodology on the mental health and well-being of athletes as measured by levels of trait anxiety and athletic coping skills.¹⁵

Introduction

This review of the related literature is a phenomenological “dance,” as Jerry Gill (1993) would say, through the essential elements that comprise our experience with sport, anxiety and how we cope. Through examining the literature, we find that as sport moved from an essential part of the educational mission of higher education and became big business (Clotfelter, 2011; Smith, 1988), athletes became more and more disconnected and dehumanized. Race and gender add a more complex component, furthering the commodification of athletes as tools for unpaid entertainment or avenues to alleviate gender Title IX quota numbers to support revenue sports (Byers, 1995; Gavora, 2002; Hawkins, 2010, Powell, 2008; Ware, 2007). The literature also shows us that phenomenology can be utilized as a methodology to better understand the subjective experience of athletes (Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2010; Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2015; Breivik, 2013; Burton et. al, 2006; Cronin & Armour, 2015; Dale, 1996; Hockey & Collinson, 2007; Hughson & Inglis, 2002; James, 2017; Purser, 2018; Wacquant, 2004; Wharton, 2004). Finally, the literature enables us to construct a pedagogy based on Gill’s theoretical approach to learning (1993); Garrison’s reliance on passion, intuition, and vulnerability (1997); Lickona’s emphasis on role-modeling and storytelling (1991); and the ability of asking the correct questions to lead athletes to a better understanding of their personal experience in sport (Reimer et. al, 1983; Stoll, Beller, & Hahm, 2004).

In sum, this review of the related literature will begin with a general discussion of how collegiate athletics have developed into the current state we find it today. The review will then turn to a discussion of how phenomenology can be used in study of sport.

¹⁴ This is the original problem statement with a four-group design. The change to a two-group pre/posttest design is addressed in full in Chapter Four.

¹⁵ A systematic observation of coaching behavior was planned for both experimental groups and both control groups and tabled due to Covid-19 restrictions.

Furthermore, the review will explore the work of educational scholars so that an intentional coaching pedagogy can be constructed on a sound foundation of epistemological research. Finally, the review will explore the literature concerning trait anxiety and coping skills in a sport setting placing this study into a larger context and purpose.

Byers and the NCAA

The first intercollegiate competition in the United States was conceived and organized by students in the mid-1840s. By the turn of the century, eastern colleges were competing in some 19 sports. This all came through student initiative and effort. The students set in place the underlying structure for college sports. Today, professional coaches, professional managers and money-minded presidents have *total control*. It is time to give back to the students who play sports the freedoms they deserve. At a minimum they are entitled to freedoms enjoyed by their fellow students (Byers, 1995, p. 398).

Walter Byers served as the executive director of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) from 1951 to 1987, a term of almost forty years. Not only did Byers create what would become the NCAA rules enforcement program, but also stewarded the exponential growth of collegiate athletics into a billion-dollar industry built on the talents of amateur athletes (Byers, 1995). By the time of the publication of his memoir in the mid-1990s, in a seeming change of heart, Byers began championing a movement toward the creation of an Athlete's Bill of Rights he hoped would be eventually enacted by the United States Congress.

Such a guarantee of rights and freedoms would go far in treating the twin curses of exploitation and hypocrisy that have bedeviled college athletics in direct proportion to its intensified commercialization (Byers, 1995, p. 374).

Now over a quarter of a century later, the fallacy of collegiate amateurism is becoming more apparent as the NCAA has awarded athletes more freedom in transferring to different institutions and has begun discussions, allowing athletes with the ability to do so, the opportunity to profit from their name, image, or likeness, dubbed NIL (Hosick, 2021). By the fall of 2021, the NIL experiment is being implemented into collegiate athletic departments across the country with unknown consequences. Athletic compliance departments are hiring outside consultants to assist in this transition, but the business of

college athletics is in a tremendous paradigm shift (Texas Athletics, 2020). Finally, in a move that could mark the eventual death of the current NCAA system, the Southeast Conference (SEC) has agreed to expand once again by inviting the University of Texas, University of Oklahoma, and Oklahoma State University to join its ranks (Diamond, 2021). Many feel that this move will lead to the SEC establishing its own set of rules outside of the NCAA governing body of the last century. In a counter move, the ACC, Big-10, and PAC-12 conferences have reached a “gentlemen’s agreement” on scheduling and future rules consideration (Dellenger, 2021). All these fundamental changes to elite level collegiate athletics illustrate that protecting financial interests are of primary importance as opposed to the educational value of athletics.

Since the late 19th century, American universities have collectively struggled with how to come to terms with the growth and commercialization of athletic endeavors originally meant to be part and parcel of the educational mission. While not dealing with athletics specifically, moral educators Reimer, Paollitto, and Hersh (1983), tackled similar ethical dilemmas in the classroom.

...[E]ducating people for democratic citizenship requires making certain value choices based on moral standards. Kohlberg points out that in the absence of a clear understanding of moral principles, people in positions of authority, including teachers, all too often resort to the capricious and expedient use of their authority as the means of resolving moral conflict (p. 12).

“The expedient use of authority” is the operational mantra of modern-day athletic departments. Whether it is the authority used by athletic directors in the hiring and firing of coaches; the authority of coaches exerted over the athletes in their charge; the authority of athletic trainers to get athletes back on the field; the authority of academic advisors in picking easier classes to master; or the authority of campus police silently shuttling guilty athletes back to their coaches for discipline; the student-athlete today is exposed to little or no moral education within the athletic department (Stoll & Beller, 1998). Instead, today’s study-athlete is exposed to a tremendous amount of authority. However, none of the numerous authority figures are concerned with promoting moral growth only promoting wins or donations by boosters. Their athletes are resources meant to be utilized for the growth and

well-being of the athletic department *not* the growth and well-being of the individual.

Charles Clotfelter's *Big-Time Sports in American Universities* concludes that

...[T]he NCAA system of college athletics is broken. It is financially and academically corrupt, and morally bankrupt (2011, p. 11).

Clotfelter astutely observes that despite the corruption of college athletics and the commodification of its amateur athletes, very few institutions of higher learning have abandoned athletics as-a-whole.

...[W]e could reasonably expect to observe more than a few universities, having made the decision to participate in big-time sports, changing their minds and dropping out or reentering the fray. But this is not what we observe (2011, p. 11).

Clotfelter states that of the 72 colleges that were ranked in the top 100 football schools in 1920, all but nine remain playing at the highest level in 2009 (2011, p. 12). Simply, once an institution embraces big-time sports, they remain entangled in that embrace for good.

Faculty may complain about the priorities placed on athletic budgets, but little if anything has been done to change this system.¹⁶ Too much is at stake, mostly the perceived perception of the institution from its donors. If the entire NCAA system is morally bankrupt, how can we expect the developing minds of our student-athletes to make moral and just decisions on the playing field, in the classroom, or in the community? Furthermore, if a young developing athlete perceives herself as expendable, replaceable, or objectified, her sense of self is subject to potentially deep, lasting, and damaging effects. The pressure to compete, to raise money, and to even justify its continuation, has caused athletic departments to embrace expediency as opposed to morality. Common practice has replaced common decency and common sense. If academic advisors now advise against challenges in the classroom, can we even say that we are concerned with athletes' education?¹⁷ More importantly, the growth of college athletics as big business now has a dehumanizing effect on the very people upon whom this

¹⁶ In 2009, the faculty at the University of California at Berkeley rose in revolt against the large subsidies being provided to the athletic department. The only result being that the faculty senate recommended that the chancellor attempt to reduce athletics' deficits (Clotfelter, 2011, p. 34). Although not in the BSC, Eastern Washington University is continuing to debate whether a continuation of its athletic department is financially viable for its institution. Yet, EWU appears to be the exception rather than the rule (Steinbach, 2020). However, things have recently changed with EWU alum Cooper Kupp winning Superbowl MVP in 2021 in a renewed Flutie effect (Perez, 2022).

¹⁷ The most recent and most notable example occurred at the University of North Carolina and its offering of "paper courses" that benefitted athletes' eligibility while never actually having to do any work (Ganesan, 2021).

house of cards was constructed. The alarming rise in levels of anxiety and depression, among college athletes, appears to be a direct result of the disconnect between the educational mission of the university and the financial interest of its athletic departments (Rao et al., 2015; Cox et al., 2017). To better understand this current ethical, educational, mental health, and philosophical crisis, one needs to first understand the history of college athletics and the movement away from athlete-controlled sports to athletic departments run by the institution with ever-increasing and bloated budgets (Clotfelter, 2011; Smith, 1988).

The Birth of College Athletics

...[S]ome physical educators feel *self-responsibility* is one of the most important outcomes that can accrue from physical education. This importance is geared to the maturing influence which decision-making, and accepting and shouldering responsibility for consequences, have on the student. We are saying that the existential believes in the development of personal responsibility in choosing alternatives of *many* kinds (Davis, 1963, p. 110).

In their *Brief History of American Sport*, Elliot Gorn and Warren Goldstein, like most social historians of their time, sought to describe the central themes in the growth of American sport rather than a comprehensive survey of sports history (2004, p. xiii). Tracing the evolution of American sport over the course of more the three hundred and fifty years, Gorn and Goldstein's work illustrates how cultural and social changes in the fabric of America are directly reflected, if not overtly influenced, by the changes in values of average and upper-class Americans' attitudes toward organized sport (2004). While sports in North America predated the arrival of Europeans in the 15th century, the complex relationship between sport and the growth of American society may have begun before the country's birth. However, the rapid changes in the United States during the urbanization and modernization of the 19th century are directly mirrored in the issues of class, gender, education, morality, money, and religion found in the history and flourishing of American sports. Gorn and Goldstein's work examines an idea that the rapid expansion of collegiate football is a fundamental departure from the early educational goals of universities and physical educators.

The Early Power of Collegiate Football

Far from academic achievement, the experience and culture of football linked different generations of American leaders in a collegiate socialization process that helped provide class cohesion for the children of the American upper classes...[R]egional colleges and state universities filled many of the same functions, if for a slightly lower class (Gorn & Goldstein, 2004, pp. 164).

Little debate exists as to the power that collegiate football programs exercise on modern college campuses. However, by the late 19th century, football had already emerged as an intrinsic part of the collegiate experience of many young men (and some women). As Yale graduate and later football coach, Walter Camp, worked to standardize rules to the modern football game, making it decidedly different than its European equivalent of rugby, controversy arose as to the violent nature of the sport itself. Similar controversy plagues the sport today as more information surfaces to the potential devastating effects of repeated concussions on brain health and life expectancy (Fainaru-Wada & Fainaru, 2013). Yet Camp's argument for the merits of football could easily be the words of an athletic director on one of today's college campuses. Camp was "[c]onvinced that 'American business has found in American college football the optimization of present-day business methods,' Camp claimed that the game "has come to be recognized as the best school for instilling into the young man those attributes which business desires and demands" (Gorn & Goldstein, 2004, pp. 158-9). Walter Camp's use of football as paralleling early 20th century business practices was not an accident, nor did it fall on deaf ears. Yet the historical ground was fertile for the growth of football in the turn of the century and Camp astutely used this imagery to build a winning product on the field. Gorn and Goldstein extend their analysis even further.

Men entering college at the close of the 19th century grew up with fathers who had suffered and served during the Civil War. Having no war of their own in which to "come of age," many upper-class college students looked to define their manhood on the gridiron.

It [football] built camaraderie among men who were expected to take up leadership positions in the communities. The intense emotional identification fostered by football bound men to one another and to their class long after their gridiron days had passed. The shared experience of violence made these bounds especially strong. The risk of injury run by each player, the degree to

which he depended on his fellows to protect him, the relief at surviving danger, and the sense of having come through something together that others could not share gave football players the feeling of being special...[S]uch feelings are also perhaps characteristic of bonds between combat veterans... (Gorn & Goldstein, 2004, pp. 162-3).

Perhaps the best evidence of the early power of collegiate football is that by 1890, colleges that sponsored a football program saw the sport become the largest revenue producer after tuition (Gorn & Goldstein, 2004; Smith, 1988). As alumni gained control over how football was run so too did they begin to gain control over how the overall university was run as well. One can therefore make the logical conclusion that collegiate football has exerted a profound influence over American higher education for over 100 years. While changes in societal ideas over the importance of sport may have led to the growth and popularity of collegiate football, the sport itself quickly and decidedly began to influence life in American higher education.

It [football] assisted in the redefinition of American middle-and-upper-class masculinity; it helped reorganize American colleges and universities into institutions controlled by alumni in the service of class socialization and character-building at the expense of academics; it provided a public spectacle of upper-class display; and it furnished an experience of corporate, collective, quasi-military physical combat for sons of national and local elites (Gorn & Goldstein, 2004, pp. 169).

While no longer viewed as a sport to showcase American upper- and middle-class elites, collegiate football now panders to an ideal that it allows an opportunity for lower-income, often minority students, a chance to receive a higher education and build their character (Harbaugh, 2015). Admitting that the education is often secondary, modern football coaches, administrators, and college officials trumpet the 19th century tenants of character building these young men receive on the football field. Further complicating how modern sport is dehumanizing and commodifying young athletes serving multi-million-dollar athletic departments is the undercurrent of the racial paternalism exerted on the backs of mostly elite athletes of color (Coakley, 2014).

Race, Gender, and Further Complications

This current study does not directly deal with sociological issues of race and gender. However, a short review of literature concerning the exploitive nature of college athletics in relation to the African American experience as well as the need to balance gender equity numbers with female participation illustrates that the nature of athletic departments is fundamentally one of objectification (Edwards, 1969, 2017; Hawkins, 2010; Powell, 2008). Writing in the late 1960s in the months leading up to the 1968 Mexico City Olympic Games, sociologist Harry Edwards issued a call to arms for black athletes to use the platform of sport for social activism (Edwards, 1969, 2017). Writing forty years later, Billy Hawkins presents a compelling case that the system of NCAA athletics is one that commodifies athletes in general and black athletes specifically (Hawkins, 2010). Authors like Harry Edwards (1969, 2017) and Shaun Powell (2008) have written extensively on the experience of black athletes. Yet, Billy Hawkins comparison of collegiate athletics and that of chattel slavery serves as a compelling example of how the business of NCAA athletics can dehumanize marginalized peoples. Comparing the system of NCAA Division I athletics to that of the plantation system of slave labor, Hawkins believes that collegiate sports are sustained by the sweat and labor of the “black body” (Hawkins, 2010, p. 1). Hawkins makes his case largely by examining how the large predominance of African American representation in revenue sports compares to the shockingly small numbers of African Americans attending predominately white institutions as nonathletes (p. 113). Perhaps in one of his compelling examples, Hawkins juxtaposes the uncomfortably large number of white fans who fill stadiums on Saturdays to be entertained by black athletes who they ignore and marginalize for the remainder of the school week (2010). For Hawkins, the experience of the black athlete at predominately white institutions (PWIs) is a relationship of internal colonialism (p. 42). The black athlete is exploited politically, economically, and racially by the white power structure in most institutions of high learning. Hawkins also employs a concept of the black athlete as a migrant worker who leaves the urban environment of African American ghettos and travels to “labor” on large college campuses of PWIs returning back to the urban environments when his labor has been exhausted (p. 132).

In perhaps his most provocative assertion, Billy Hawkins compares the increase in participation and funding for female sports to that of the film *Driving Miss Daisy* because

female athletes are directly benefiting from the labor of black males (Hawkins, 2010, p. 101). Title IX is legislation meant to increase opportunity for female athletes to compete on a fair and equitable basis. Yet there is an overwhelming sense among Division I female athletes that their sole purpose for participation is to balance gender equity numbers so that football programs can continue to prosper. Reading Hawkins with an eye toward gender inequality further illustrates how elite level collegiate athletics is objectifying all athletes in its wake.

Things have begun to change on this front within the NCAA structure that now favor the athlete. Changes in transfer rules, cost of attendance stipends, occasional meals, and most recently proposals for being able to profit from the name, image, or likeness have given some power back to the athlete (Hosick, 2021). Yet, several of the points made by Hawkins remain a problem within the colonial system of NCAA governance along with the power structure of predominately white institutions. There is a lack of African American head coaches, administrators, Athletic Directors, Deans, and College Presidents (Hawkins, 2010).¹⁸ Black representation at the offices of the NCAA in Indianapolis is lacking as well. Hawkins expertly describes the over-representation of blacks in the labor force of revenue generating athletics contrasting that with the shocking lack of representation among its power structure (pp. 140-143). Hawkins also claims that the increase in funding and participation of White women in college athletics is due to the labor and at the expense of the Black male athlete. Hawkins calls this the “Driving Miss Daisy Syndrome.” Hawkins appears to be trying to assign blame on female sports that stand independently and not on the backs of bigtime college athletics. The systemic failings of predominately white institutions to educate and nurture Black athletes has more to do with the structure of sport than it does with Title IX and the growth of female participation. However, Hawkins’ argument concerning female athletes does illustrate how many female- identified athletes view themselves as add-ons to athletic departments to balance gender equity. This devaluing of the experience of the female athlete indicates one more way in which her sport has turned against her. The intention of Title IX is creating opportunity and not furthering exploitation. Yet most female athletes are at some time made to feel that their sport exists only for the purpose of balancing gender equity numbers or, as Gavora (2002) posits, at the expense or eventual elimination of

¹⁸ While some progress has been made, current research indicates that African-American representation among coaches is still grossly out of line with the population of players, see Brassil and Lutz, “In 30 Years, Little Progress for U.S. Sports Leagues on Leadership Diversity” (Brassil & Lutz, 2020).

male nonrevenue sports. This phenomenon leads to further alienation, objectification, and an ontological break from the sport these female athletes once loved.¹⁹ A review of the history and implementation of Title IX illustrates that although female participation has grown exponentially since 1972, women's sports continue to operate under the myth of being funded by the labor of revenue producing men's athletics (Ware, 2007). This air of "otherness" follows female athletes throughout their collegiate career.²⁰ Male identified athletes can simply be a ball player while female athletes will always be identified as a "women's basketball player," "female swimmer," or "women's lacrosse player." All athletic departments still need to have a Senior Women's Administrator or SWA to insure gender equity and fairness. Still, a closer reading of the history of Title IX sheds light on a larger problem which needs further study. As equity in participation has become more common, the female model of athletics, where participation was valued above competition, has become a thing of the past (Ware, 2007). The competitive revenue-driven male model of big-time college athletics, which now includes women in greater numbers, could be responsible for the creation of more anxiety and stress for all athletes despite their gender.

Title IX

In 1972, after the passage of the Education Amendments Act, thirty-seven words changed the course of female athletics, athletics in general, and how sport would be perceived globally for the next 50 years (Ware, 2007, p. vii.).²¹ Known as Title IX, this section of legislation outlawed any gender discrimination under any educational program receiving federal funding (p.3). However, as the law was worded, all programs at an educational institution which received federal funding (even if not directly to the program itself) were subject to Title IX. Therefore, grossly underfunded, and inequitable women's athletic programs needed to be addressed. Still, implementation of Title IX did not immediately take effect until 1974-75 and not on a large scale until 1979 (Ware, 2007). Scholars of Title IX have debated whether participation in female athletics would have reached the same numbers naturally by the late 1970s without federal intervention (Gavora, 2002; Ware 2007). In fact, by 1971, a year before the passage of Title IX, female

¹⁹ Female swimming serves as the perfect example of an outcome-driven Olympic sport that carries a large roster and generates no revenue for athletic departments.

²⁰ While not part of this current study a potential examination of the history of female athletics post-Title IX through the philosophical framework of Friere's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2018) could explore this concept further.

²¹ See also, Title IX, <https://www.justice.gov/crt/title-ix> for a complete wording of the entire legal document.

participation in athletics already showed signs of booming (Gavora, 2002; Ware, 2007). Whether Title IX sped up the process, opened the gates, or forced athletic departments to allow for greater participation, by the beginning of the 1980s, the NCAA had taken notice and began to offer its own version of women's national championships while also applying pressure to its member institutions to bring their women's teams onboard and under their control. Therefore, by the close of the 1981 season, in one of the first examples of the unintended consequences of Title IX, the Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW)²² disbanded allowing for the NCAA to become the primary governance body for female athletics. Once directed by women, female sports would now be determined largely by a group of white males. For Ware (2007), this shift to the NCAA model and away from the AIAW saw a "...[s]ignificant chance for a different kind of women's athletics—less commercial, more focused on education and participation, potentially less exploitative...lost" (p. 12). Not only were the women henceforth being governed by the men of the NCAA, but they were now being coached more by males as well. According to Ware, "...[i]n 1973, women has coached 92 percent of women's teams, but by 1984 this had dropped to 53.8 percent and by 2002 it was only 44 percent" (p. 15). A 2018 study conducted by the Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport at the University of Minnesota showed that the sport of swimming had among the lowest number of female coaches coaching female teams, giving the sport a grade of "F" (Hart, 2018). The study also concluded that in the almost 20 years since Ware's 2002 statistic, the number of female head coaches coaching women's teams had fell to 41.7% (Hart, 2018). More women were participating, but the majority were still being directed by men.²³

²² In 1966, the Commission on Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (CIAW) was created to encourage the expansion of opportunities for college women's athletics. In 1971, the AIAW grew out of the CIAW's "realization that women's intercollegiate athletics needed a permanent, national membership organization to coordinate its activities. Like its predecessors, the AIAW shared a commitment to a more participation-oriented, less elitist approach to sports that differed fundamentally from the reigning male model of sports which intertwined competition, winning, and commercialization" (Ware, p. 11, 2007). The archival collection for the AIAW is currently housed at the University of Maryland, College Park, and can be found at, AIAW Documents, <https://archives.lib.umd.edu/repositories/2/resources/1149#>.

²³ For a discussion on women and coaching see Acosta & Carpenter, *Women in Intercollegiate Sport: A National Longitudinal Study* (2014). For a discussion on the perception of female coaches, see Aicher & Sagas, *Are Head Coaches in Intercollegiate Athletics Perceived as Masculine* (2010)? Finally, for a discussion on female coaches and their decision to leave coaching, see Kamphoff, *Bargaining with Patriarchy: Former Female Coaches' Experience and Their Decision to Leave College Coaching* (2010).

By the mid-1990s, the second wave of unintended consequences of Title IX began as athletic departments across the country saw a way to reach the first prong²⁴ of gender equity by eliminating non-revenue men's programs (Gavora, 2002). By eliminating male sports like wrestling, swimming, and baseball, athletic departments could save money and show that their proportionality numbers for gender balance were more in line with the overall population of the institution. All this could be accomplished without creating any new opportunities for women (2002). Jessica Gavora (2002), extremely critical of the unintended consequences of Title IX, states,

...[p]erhaps nowhere in the litany of the second thoughts about the nanny state are the “unintended consequences” invoked more often than in reference to Title IX. To be exact, a law designed to end discrimination against women is now causing discrimination against men (Gavora, p. 4, 2002).

The two treatment groups of this current study serve as the perfect example of how Title IX can both create opportunities for female athletes while also creating anxiety, stress, and a sense of tokenism and objectification. In 2004, the University of Idaho reinstated the women's swimming team after a more than twenty-year hiatus (www.govandals.com). The women's program at Idaho was eliminated in 1985, the men following a year later, both programs suffering a fate due to a budget crisis at the institution (Fanning, 1985). While creating opportunities for many female swimmers and eventually divers over the next eighteen years, the reinstatement of swimming had more to do with the athletic department reaching the minimum of sixteen sponsored sports to compete at the FBS football level and to “come into compliance with the proportionality requirements of Title IX” (Whitten, 2004). Following a decision to “drop down” to an FSC football standard in 2016 (Loh, 2016), Idaho found that the sixteen-sport threshold no longer applied to their department and a path for saving money for the cash-strapped institution appeared.²⁵ In the spring of 2018, the

²⁴ Although Title IX was passed in 1972, it took until 1979 for the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) to create its final standards for how schools could become in compliance with the law, see Title IX, <https://www.justice.gov/crt/title-ix>. Often referred to as the “three-prong” test, the first prong states that the school must require opportunities to participate that match the proportion of the general population of enrollment of the institution. The second prong is vaguer allowing the institution to show that it has a history of attempting to match the growing interest or need of the underrepresented gender. The final prong leaves it to the institution to show that it has “fully and effectively” met the needs and interests of the underrepresented gender (Ware, p. 6, 2007).

²⁵ Idaho is currently the only institution to move from FBS to FSC in the last 60 years of college football. It is important to note that the University of Chicago left the Big Ten Conference in 1946 but dropped to Division III, which meant the elimination of all athletic scholarships. However, the University of Chicago is known among many to be one of the top academic institutions in the country (Loh, 2016).

University of Idaho appeared likely, or at least potentially willing, to eliminate three sports (women's swimming included) in order to account for its budget shortfalls (Harriman, 2018). For the next four years, the University of Idaho Swimming & Diving team has existed under a cloud of uncertainty. Yet, a closer reading of gender equity numbers revealed that Idaho did not have the Title IX space to cut programs, adhering to the first prong test of 1979. Furthermore, if sports were to be cut, new female sports would have to be added, a move thought difficult to justify with the current budget shortfalls of the athletic department and the institution as a whole (personal communication, 2021). It is therefore easy to conclude that Idaho swimming was reinstated for football and survives for the sake of football today as well.

If we are to better understand how the history and growth of college athletics has led directly and indirectly to the objectification and dehumanization of athletes, utilization of the existential methodology of phenomenology in sport may give insight into the subjective impact of elite level collegiate sport on the individual experience. But it may also help fill a need of the marginalization that the female athlete suffers—and again, the literature tells a story that women athletes suffer higher levels of stress and anxiety (Cox et al., 2017).

Phenomenology as Method²⁶

The big business of college athletics has an objectifying and dehumanizing effect on the athletes it is meant to serve. If we accept this notion, then there exists a need to reestablish a methodology of coaching that pays attention to the subjective lived experience of the person. The pathway back to the needs of the athlete is through a philosophical lens of phenomenology. To better understand how to create a phenomenological coaching pedagogy, one must first understand phenomenology as a method.

Mathematician Edmund Husserl (1962) is often the starting point for those wishing to see the birth of the existential departure from empiricism and positivism known as phenomenology (Wharton, 2004, p.1). In his attempt to go beyond the work of Husserl, the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty sought to explain *Being* through his understanding of pure perception or simply the lived experience (Merleau-Ponty, 1964).

²⁶ Creswell (2013) and Moustakas (1994) are thought to be among the leaders in qualitative or phenomenological research methods. This current study is unique, however, because rather than relying on modern phenomenological researchers, our study looks to construct an entire pedagogy based on an original methodology utilizing the original writers of phenomenological reduction of the subjective lived experience.

Merleau-Ponty viewed perception as more than just the gathering of empirical data. Being present in the “lived experience,” the subject becomes not just part of the experience but the experience itself. In her work on Human Movement Forms of the Third Dynasty of Ur, Stoll (1980) explains Merleau-Ponty’s concept of intentionality.

According to Merleau-Ponty, the subject is his body, his world. Accordingly, then, true intentionality is not pure reflective as Husserl contends. Reflective consciousness is grounded in pre-reflective consciousness since the primordial consciousness of the body-subject is a being-in-the-world or existence as it is lived in the world...[I]ntentionality is engagement in the world. Intention is existence (1980).

Simply, the subject exists in a dialectic interdependence with the object. The “intentionality” of the experience forces a “continued birth” of both subject and object (Merleau-Ponty, 1964).²⁷

Many scholars have approached humanistic research in a way that claims to be phenomenological. To truly utilize phenomenology, three components must be employed: presuppositionless perspective, epochè, and reduction.

Presuppositionless Perspective:

To get to the thing, one must abandon all theories, thoughts, beliefs, biases, and presumptions, in order to get closer to the essence of the experience. A reflective process occurs as one examines the experience. One must see the experience as it presents itself to the subject not as the subject assumes it should be (Spiegelberg, 1971).

Epochè:

The concept of epochè can also be referred to as “bracketing” of the experience. This bracketing is focusing on one part of the experience at a time in order to reduce and better understand the truth behind it. Don Ihde presents this method using multi-stable visual phenomena like the “Necker Cube” in his work *Experimental Phenomenology* (Ihde, 1986). Bracketing allows us to understand the experience more completely because we are able to see things one at a time, getting a fuller picture through a more singular focus.

²⁷ Stoll (1980) and her student Wharton (2004) both present an excellent explanation of the phenomenological method with great detail and can be referenced in either dissertation. However, a list of some of the appropriate terms will be useful here before we continue.

Reduction:

Ultimately what the phenomenological method is attempting to accomplish is a reduction of the “lived experience” to its ontological truth. For the phenomenologists, there are two types of reductions, “eidetic” and “transcendental.” Eidetic reduction is reducing the immediate experience in order to get to the essential part of the encounter (Spiegelberg, 1971). Transcendental reduction is for Merleau-Ponty an illusory concept because one never achieves pure consciousness and it always present as a body-mind being-in-the-world. Thus, one cannot achieve ultimate reduction because one cannot separate oneself from the world. Still, the idea of reducing the experience to its essence or truth is the ultimate goal of the phenomenological method (Spiegelberg, 1971; Stoll, 1980).

Examples of Phenomenology in Sport Research

The Norwegian sport scientists and philosophers Oyvind Standal and Vegard Moe attempt a methodological descriptive comparison of Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological notion of embodied learning and that of R. Scott Kretchmar’s “classical notion of the sweet tension of uncertainty of outcome” (Kretchmar, 1975), to add to the ongoing philosophical discussion concerning the phenomenology of skill acquisition by elite athletes. Perhaps the most renowned contributor to the literature about skill acquisition is the existentialist Hubert Dreyfus (2014). Dreyfus posits five stages of skill development dubbed “skillful coping” in which someone who becomes an expert or elite in an activity is really absorbed in the world in an unreflective and instinctual way (Dreyfus, 2014). Kelly (2000), a follower of Dreyfus claims that

...[e]ngaged activity is normative in a special sense: it involves a kind of solicitation in which the world is intrinsically motivating for the agent, an agent who is unreflectively engaged in it (Kelly, 2000, as cited in Standal & Moe, 2011, p. 17).

In contrast, Breivik finds that Dreyfus’ phenomenology renders the elite athlete “zombie-like,’ and therefore lacking conscious awareness (Breivik, 2013). Breivik instead believes that the elite athlete operates with almost a heightened awareness as opposed to unreflective coping or absorption. Most recently, contemporary philosopher Aaron James (2017), employs the work of Jean-Paul Sartre (1956) to illustrate that the elite surfer possesses a level of attunement to his surroundings and the ever-changing nature of the ocean. This attunement

allows the surfer to be free to make decisions (although often instinctively), all the while reaching a level of transcendence (James, 2017). Standal and Moe (2011) enter this discussion hoping to better define how an athlete's background capacities can enter into the foreground of the activity in a way that does not require heavy reflection but also is not pure instinct and "zombie-like" as criticized by Breivik (2013, p. 2). While this appears on the surface to be an epistemological discussion because it concerns the acquisition and implementation of knowledge, Standal and Moe (2011) enter into a deeply nuanced and thoughtful description on a more ontological and existential level. Ultimately, what is it like to be-in-elite-sport?

Critical of most empirical studies that employ a cognitive approach to skill acquisition, Standal and Moe (2011) believe that most western philosophical accounts of epistemology rely too heavily on visual metaphors. Citing Brinkman and Tanggaard (2010), for most knowing is seeing and "...learning happens through visual confrontation with the eye" (2011, p.19). Yet, a phenomenological understanding of skill acquisition posits an epistemology of the hand, namely we learn through our bodies that find themselves situated in-the-world. Still, these two epistemologies do not compete with each other.

...[I]n dynamic movement situations, the perceptual gestalts are continually fluctuating due to embodied involvement of the agent, and a purely visual gestalt will not aptly capture the perceptual terrain of skilled sport performers (Standal & Moe, 2011, p. 19).

Gestalt psychology explains that the visual perception of the subject can often be biased or change in any situation (Does one see a picture of a vase or two faces?) Thus, while vision is important to the lived experience it is also important to understand that we know the world through our bodies and not simply through our consciousness (pp. 19-20).

The embodied athlete is not constructing meaning into his skilled activity. Like James' philosopher surfer who surfs for surfing's sake (James, 2017), the phenomenologist finds meaning in the activity and does not create it. It is here that Standal and Moe's discussion of Merleau-Ponty's description of the spatiality within a soccer pitch is enlightening.

...[A] crucial aspect of embodiment in sporting situations is the intertwining of a moving body-subject and the immediate environment where the

movement takes place, illustrated by the football field (Standal & Moe, 2011, p. 8).

The football player finds himself situated on a soccer field that while possessing certain dimensions it appears to the player instead as a series of “lived spatiality of movement projects” (p.9). The field is not a series of geometrical terms but more a tension between the spacing of opposing players that present the possibility of certain actions that will continue to fluctuate within that spatial and temporal experience. Here Standal and Moe again look to Merleau-Ponty for answers. The tensions between the spacing of players and the choices and possibilities that becomes present to the subject leads one to understand

...[a] movement is to experience the harmony between what we aim at and what is given, between the intention and the performance” (Merleau-Ponty as cited in Standal & Moe, 2011, p. 10).

Thus, the learning of new skills for the elite athlete opens up new possibilities within the movement activity. Skill acquisition can therefore make the activity more meaningful to the subject (yet James would argue the activity has meaning in itself) “...to acquire and refine skills is to open up the world or perhaps even new world” (Standal & Moe, 2011, p. 10).

The real brilliance of Standal and Moe’s study is not their phenomenological explication of skill acquisition but their juxtaposition and interpretation of Kretchmar’s (1975) use of the phrase “sweet tension” as the underlying ontological situation in which the elite athlete finds himself.²⁸

[T]he movement project undertaken by the athlete will have success conditions, that is, the athletes can succeed or fail to meet a certain kind of appropriateness... Movement projects are thus characterized by normative tension. To further understand this normativity, we have introduced the notion of sweet tension of uncertainty of outcome. It was used to illuminate how a true test invokes a genuine sense of uncertainty in the athlete who is

²⁸ For a more detailed account see R. Scott Kretchmar (1975) From test to contest: an analysis of two kinds of counterpoint in sport, *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 2:1, 23-30, DOI: [10.1080/00948705.1975.10654094](https://doi.org/10.1080/00948705.1975.10654094). Kretchmar acknowledges in his second footnote that the term “sweet tension” should be attributed to Warren P. Fraleigh. Fraleigh discusses this concept in *Right Actions in Sport* (1984). While Fraleigh published his discussion later than Kretchmar, Kretchmar attributes the idea to the former thereby beginning a sixty-year discussion between the two scholars.

compelled to be engaged in it because the test has just the right level of difficulty, that is, the right mix of being achievable or unattainable (Standal & Moe, 2011, p.15)

Simply, the athlete chooses to be in this tension filled uncertainty because she *enjoys* the “test or contest.” Yet, the athlete’s skills must always be at hand or ready for action when they find themselves in a contest or against an opponent. Aaron James dubs this readiness a type of attunement (James, 2017) where the surfer is ready to respond to changing conditions. He does this skillfully and intently but not necessarily consciously because at the moment of response he as subject, and wave as object, seize to be separate. The same occurs on the soccer pitch where athletes call upon their elite skills in response to their ontological situation within the sweet tension of contest. An elite player will be able to see spacing differently, identify better opportunities for passing, shooting, and so forth (Standal & Moe, 2011, p.16). The player does not simply operate on instinct nor are they contemplating every shot. Instead, the pure existential nature of the sweet tension of the contest allows the player to have their skills on hand and ready to enact should the situation present itself. All is much different from the skillful coping described by Dreyfus where physical activity is absorbed into the background of the lived world like grasping a doorknob to open a door without thought or reflection (Standal & Moe, 2011, p. 17; Dreyfus, 2014). The activity of skillful athletics is always in the foreground of the experience and never in the periphery. These skills “...make up the very center of athletic engagement, what the athlete aims at what her motor intentionality is basically directed at” (Standal & Moe, 2011, p. 18).

Through their skillful description of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of skills acquisition along with Fraleigh (1984) and Kretchmar’s (1975) depiction of the ontological nature of the sweet tension of sport, Standal and Moe add to the literature of sport philosophy but also epistemology and the study of knowledge. Breivik is correct that to liken the elite athlete to someone who only operates on instinct is to make her zombie-like (Breivik, 2013). Yet, anyone who has ever played a sport understands that if you are in the moment and thinking too much, you are probably not playing very well or responding to some obstacle or mishap. Therefore, the embodied athlete, attuned to the sweet tension of the contest, is ready and able to respond in a learned, abled and elite way.

Allen-Collison and Hockey (2010) examined the two sports of distance running and scuba diving from an embodied phenomenological perspective. Allen-Collinson and Hockey give an extremely profound philosophical background on phenomenology, focusing primarily on the work of Merleau-Ponty, laying the theoretical foundation for examining haptic knowing. While the authors' scope of interviews lacked in numbers, most empirical scientists would expect, the depth and mindfulness of their methods illustrate that a shift from ocular knowing to haptic knowing could prove to be essential in understanding skill acquisition in sport (2010).

Allen-Collison and Hockey (2015) also created a two-year joint autoethnographic research study examining the mundane activity of distance running from a sensory perspective with a phenomenological base. The previous study (2010) relied heavily on haptic knowing, here the researchers employ a more visual dimension. The "runner's vision" becomes situated in their running routes leading to a sensuous albeit repetitive experience. Ultimately the Allen-Collison and Hockey give another way to understand how an athlete lives as an embodied being within the sporting experience (2015).

Hughson and Inglis (2002) give a phenomenological perspective of a soccer experience. Using primarily the work of Merleau-Ponty as the philosophical base, Hughson and Inglis not only attempt to describe the aesthetic beauty of the game but also create a new vocabulary to better understand the embodied knowing which occurs on the pitch. Perhaps the most compelling part of their discussion of the spatiality on the field and how the elite player can see and experience space differently from others. Again, this adds to the discussion on athletic consciousness (2002).

Purser (2018) examines the athletic and artistic activity of dance through the philosophical framework of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. While Merleau-Ponty suggests that the body can be a form of transcendence, Purser explores the debate between Dreyfus and Breivik concerning the level of consciousness of an elite athlete while they are in the moment. Purser gives the reader another option between the two sides of this debate. Coined "inhabited transcendence" Purser sees dancers as being both in their bodies and transcending a level of consciousness as well (2018).

Rutter (2007) uses an extremely creative, complicated, and occasionally confusing methodology as he develops a phenomenological study of the sport of boxing through the

appearance of the face. Rutter utilizes personal reflections, memories, theoretical reflections and occasional verse to better explore what it means to be-in-boxing. The extending metaphor of “the face” gives the author a basis for exploring the experience of pugilism with the works of Derrida (1994), Heidegger (1953, 1996), and Levinas (1969) as his philosophical framework. Rutter (2007) explains how phenomenology can appear anti-empirical but still be academically sound (2007). Schumacher et al. (2016) discuss how a phenomenological study can be scientifically rigorous. Conducting phenomenological interviews with twenty open-water channel swimmers, the authors discovered 2028 different meaning units that were then grouped into themes, subthemes, and major dimensions. Other experiences discovered included environmental, physical, social, and psychological. Schumacher et al. discussed the athletes’ coping skills, perception of time, as well as perception of pain. Ultimately, they argue that one can conduct a very sound scientific and phenomenological study at the same time (2016).

Lois Wacquant (2008) comes incredibly close to documenting the true lived experience of someone entering the culture and embodied space of a Southside boxing gym in the late 1980s.

Breaking with the moralizing discourse—that indifferently feeds both celebration and denigration—produced by the “gaze from afar” of an outside observer standing at a distance from or above the specific universe, this book suggest how boxing “makes sense” as soon as one takes pains to get close enough to grasp it *with one’s body*, in a quasi-experimental situation (Wacquant, 2004, p. 7).

Wacquant immerses himself completely into the community of the boxing gym. He does so with no pretense, no agenda, and honestly. He spends months paying his dues and training without so much as trying to understand the culture as an academic but instead as an athlete and a man. Like all athletes, Wacquant humbles himself first as a novice, in hopes of learning the sweet science of boxing. The uniqueness of Wacquant’s work is that it began as an attempt to understand the cultural aspects of ghetto life in Chicago’s southside in the late 1980s. Through boxing, Wacquant instead learned that the boxing gym is a community unto itself with a distinct culture, its own communal pedagogy, and brilliant coach who serves as conductor, confidant, and mentor of scores of young men (Wacquant, 2004).

...[T]he gym functions in the manner of a *quasi-total institution* that purports to regiment the whole existence of the fighter—his use of time and space, the management of his body, his state of mind, and his most intimate desires. So much so that pugilists often compare working out in the gym to entering the military (2004, p. 56).

When Wacquant entered the gym for the first time, he did so with a desire to learn more about what life was like in the inner-city of Chicago. Hoping to use these boxers as a case study, Wacquant instead found a separate world existing within a world. The gym could teach him about ghetto life only in the fact that it stood as a stark contrast to life on the Chicago streets.

Indeed it is in its *double relationship of symbiosis and opposition* to the neighborhood and to the grim realities of the ghetto that the gym defines itself (Wacquant, 2004, p. 17).

The gym had strict rules, language, ideas of masculinity, and even its own sense of time controlled in three-minute increments (Wacquant, 2004). The first thing a new boxer learns in the Woodlawn Gym is what he cannot do. No outside food, no outside drink, no cursing or foul language, no talking during drills, no sitting on the corner of tables, no fighting except in the ring, and that all drills must be completed in a strict order defined by the head trainer DeeDee (Wacquant, 2004, p. 55). All is meant to establish the expectations, the culture, and the environment. Rules are explained for their purpose and intent not simply their punitive outcome. Life in the Woodlawn Gym has structure and meaning. There exists an ethos and the rigidity of the community is something that stands as a foil to the outside world.

The gym is a community that has appeal transcending the athletic value of boxing. There is security and safety. Instead of chaos, all movement is controlled by a stopwatch around the neck of the trainer and the myth of American meritocracy becomes a reality as athletes are judged by their effort and commitment. This current study examines the community of a swim team like the Wacquant gym. All movement at a swim practice is controlled by a clock and often one is judged based on her performance in relation to time. That rigidity can be comforting and limiting.

When we enter the church of our choice on a Sunday morning we are met by our religious community. The gym, the pool, the arena, the field, the ballpark—these are the

buildings which house the community of sport. The Woodlawn Gym became almost a sacred place or oasis in the dilapidated urban environment of the lower southside. While not impressive and decrepit in parts, the gym is sanctuary for hundreds of young men looking to belong.

The gym itself is rather crumbly: bare water pipes and electrical wires run in the open along the walls, from which the peeling yellow paint is coming off in sheets; the baseboards are broken or missing in many spots; the doors are off their hinges; and it is not unusual for pieces of plaster to come falling down in front of the mirrors. But the room is clean and well maintained and by contrast with the advanced state of decay of the surrounding neighborhood, the gym does not at all give the impression of being run down (Wacquant, 2004, p. 32).

Every athlete knows that feeling when they enter their sacred space or their second home. They know and feel the sights, sounds, and smells. They understand that if they value the space, the work, and the effort, others will support them in their athletic journey. Louie Wacquant accomplished what few ethnographers could ever hope. He did not try to dissect, analyze, or judge. Instead, he put on the gloves, put in the work, broke his nose, and *became* “Busy Louie” and a true member of the Woodlawn Gym community. This is what makes his work *Body & Soul* so unique and brilliant (Wacquant, 2004).

Louie Wacquant compares the collective activity of the Woodlawn Gym to that of a moral community described by Emile Durkheim (Durkheim, 1961, as cited in Wacquant, 2004, p. 100). Boxing, like swimming, appears to be the quintessential individual sport. Yet the training and the learning is done collectively. First, instruction or criticism is doled out by head trainer DeeDee in a loud fashion so that every boxer can hear. This is done not to berate the individual but instead to remind all boxers how something is done.

In doubt, everyone tends to take it into account for himself and redoubles his attention and application (Wacquant, 2004, p. 103).

Second, the collective enterprise of the gym instruction occurs when the more experienced boxers “...[c]ollaborate informally but actively in the instruction of the beginners” (Wacquant, 2004, p. 120).

Each member of the club passes on to those below him in the objective and subjective hierarchy of the gym the knowledge that he has received from those situated above him. Boxers of equivalent strength also share their experience, teaching each other techniques and tricks (p. 121).

Wacquant even believes that bad boxers can serve a purpose as examples of what not to do. These inept athletes are a reminder of the norms and codes of the gym that need to be attained and respected (Wacquant, 2004, p. 122).

Finally, there exists a practical pedagogical approach in the gym that must have certain definitive conditions met for proper learning to get accomplished. The first condition is the correct number of boxers being present during training. If there are too many boxers, things get confusing and complicated--too few boxers, the environment is sparse, and intensity drops. The second condition "...[i]s that the volume of pugilistic capital collectively held by members of the club...[m]ust pass a minimal threshold" (Wacquant, 2004, p. 124). Wacquant believes that the talent level in the gym must also be situated near each other in order to keep boxers of similar ability training in proximity. Third and finally, the gym must also have a steady and consistent flow of professional boxers "...[w]hich gives mutual teaching its continuity in time by counteracting the ebb and flow of the novices" (p. 124). Striking similarities occur when coaching a swim practice. Lane space and number of swimmers in the pool will directly impact the flow and vibe of a training session. Additionally, a coach should want athletes of similar abilities to be swimming in proximity to each other in order to foster competitiveness and comradery. Finally, having elite talent in the pool serves as a reminder and incentive for less experienced swimmers to strive to emulate.

The collective pedagogy of the Woodlawn Gym should be carried into every educational situation. This formula only works because of the strong, directive presence of a coach at the helm. Thus, coaching education centered on the lived experience of the athlete will empower and authenticate the personhood of those who are struggling to achieve.

Loic Wacquant's *Body & Soul* is a remarkable work of ethnography but more truly a phenomenological exploration of the lived experience inside the Woodlawn Gym (Wacquant, 2004). Wacquant gives his reader an understanding of the essence of the community formed by the boxers practicing the sweet science together. As an academic, Wacquant's work stands

as an example of how to examine sport in an authentic manner as opposed to the “gaze from afar” (Wacquant, 2004, p. 7). Wacquant also gives this current study a pathway to create a new pedagogical approach to coaching female swimmers back to their lived subjective experience with their sport. Yet the foundation of the educational philosophy employed in this intervention comes from the profound work of Jerry Gill’s *Learning to Learn* (Gill, 1993). A review of Gill (1993), as well as the works of Garrison (1997), Lickona, (1993), Reimer, Paolitto, and Hersh (1983), and Stoll, Beller and Hahm (2004), illustrate that the educational literature can establish a methodology for coaches to construct a pedagogical approach leading their athletes to a healthier understanding of their own subjective experience in the sport.

Constructing a Coaching Pedagogy: The Theoretical Approach

If an intentional coaching intervention meant to alleviate trait anxiety and increase coping skills is to be constructed, a review of appropriate pedagogical literature is needed. This review will show a need to

- 1) Understand the relationship between the knower, knowing and the known (Gill, 1993).
- 2) Will establish the necessity of understanding who the athlete is from a subjective experience (Gill, 1993).
- 3) Will explore the need to trust one’s passion, intuition, and embrace vulnerability as part of the educational process (Garrison 1997).
- 4) Will illustrate the power of storytelling and role-modelling (Lickona, 1991).
- 5) Will give multiple examples of how storytelling can be employed for pedagogical success (Abdul-Jabbar, 2017; Brown, 2014; Csikzentmihalyi, 1990; Hauerwas, 1981; James, 2017; Kretchmar, 1994; Lickona, 1991; Merleau-Ponty, 1964; Russell & Branch, 1979; Saint Sing, 2004; Thomas, 1983; Tsui, 2020; Wacquant, 2004; Wharton, 2004; Wooden, 2009).
- 6) Will illustrate the need for educators to ask the appropriate questions when aiding athletes in the attempt to bracket the essence of an experience (Reimer, Paolitto & Hersh 1983; Stoll, Beller & Hahm, 2004).

The knower, the knowing, and the known

If one is to create a new intentional coaching pedagogy, one must first explore the epistemological approach to education of Jerry Gill (1993). Gill sees education, like most

phenomenologists, as embodied and therefore directly relevant if constructing a new method for intentional coaching sport.

Thus, it is proper to say that often we think in, with, and through our bodies. Very complex skills—such as riding a bicycle and swimming, which, once learned can hardly ever be completely lost and yet cannot be explained or passed on by formula—illustrate the degree to which we think with our bodies. In fact, it is possible to argue that the basis for all knowledge is to be found in such skills... (Gill, 1993, p. 43).

The phenomenological exploration of the learning process by Jerry Gill (1993) is one illustrated by the extended metaphor of dancing. For Gill, the knower, the knowing, and the known all constitute a symbiotic relationship, each interplaying and leading the other. Gill's goal is to show us that knowledge is not something external to be consumed or acquired, but rather part of a learning process or experience led by a "more experienced learner," the teacher (Gill, 1993). The teacher, or in this current study, the coach, is not separate or external to the "dance" of knowledge espoused by Gill. The coach is also learning from the knower and is part and parcel to the subjective experience of the "knowing."²⁹

Fundamentally, Gill's pedagogical philosophy, is built on the idea that

[T]here can be no knower apart from the act of knowing and that which is known, and there can be no known apart from being known by a knower. Discussing them in isolation from one another only creates distortion and confusion (p. 46).

This idea that elite sport is an active and intentional interplay or dance between knowers, knowing, and the known is a radical break from the realistic and outcome driven nature of sport within the collegiate athletic experience. Furthermore, like Wacquant's (2004) work in the Woodlawn Gym, the researcher/coach immerses himself within the intervention and is an active participant in the educational process not apart from it.

²⁹ During the doctoral study preceding this current intervention, my exposure to Gill's work fundamentally changed the way I coach. Like Gill, I "learned" that while I have had the benefit of forty years of experience with the sport of swimming, my "knowers," or athletes, often lead our mutual dance toward success. This coaching intervention is built on a foundation of mutual exploration and knowing.

The Knowers: Who are these athletes?

Further exploring Gill's approach to education, one sees that understanding the uniqueness of the student (or athlete) is of the utmost importance if one wishes to intentionally coach the subjective experience. Gill (1993) continues,

If educators can view and interact with students as persons who are continuously evolving through fairly predictable cycles and stages, there is every hope that the cognitive process will be greatly facilitated (p. 128).

When coaches work with a team, they often spend years recruiting the athletes long before they eventually get to work with them. Over the course of those years, thoughtful coaches get to know the athletes personally, their families, their coaches, and their hopes and dreams. The journaling process (to be defined later in Chapter Three) within this intervention, is meant to establish a deep understanding between the coach/researcher and the athlete. Moreover, the manner the journals are submitted allows the coach to respond to the athlete and give her a sense of empowerment, a voice, and someone who listens.³⁰ The act of journaling is not a new technique unique to this research. The prompting of the journals and the philosophical foundation of the weekly modules, however, is unique and based heavily on this relationship between coach, athlete, sport, and substance. This is the dance to which Gill builds his epistemological approach to education. These journals also allow for a point of departure for reflection- reflection on their embodied experience in the water.

One must also emphasize that embodiment is active. It is through movement that we express and come to know our embodiment. Through physical movement we come to indwell space and time; through physical movement we encounter other physical objects and come to understand extension and solidity. In a word, we interact with, or engage, our world because we exist in and move through it...[a] moment's reflection on reflection itself clearly reveals the primordial character of embodied activity and exploration (Gill, 1993, p. 43).

The exploration that Gill mentions is the forgotten element in high level coaching. Within the twenty-hour confines of the NCAA training week, time to explore one's subjective

³⁰ While not the goal of this study, an additional by-productive of this journaling may be an increase in intrinsic motivation. For an in-depth discussion of motivation theory, see Glyn C. Roberts and Darren C. Treasure's *Advances in Motivation in Sport and Exercise* (2012).

experience is abandoned to the stress and anxiety of training the body toward the desired outcome. Yet mindful exploration should lead one back to her own lived experience and initial love of the movement activity. If this love is explored in a thoughtful, directed, and intentional manner an athlete's anxiety should decrease and her ability to cope in stressful athletic situations should increase. Coaches need to gain an understanding that they do not stand separate from this knowing process. They need to actively and intentionally lead their athletes in a "dance" toward embodied knowing of her chosen activity. This is truly intentional coaching.

The creation of a coaching intervention based on Gill's epistemological foundation must also focus on the coach/educator and their skill and intuition in the teaching environment. Garrison's (1997) exploration of *Eros* or love as the cornerstone of the educational mission serves as the backdrop for how a coach needs to relate to their athletes if they wish to help them understand their subjective experience in the water. This is done through shared inquiry, intuition, vulnerability, and love.

Shared inquiry in which students and teachers share feelings of tension and disequilibrium, needs, desire, interests, imaginations, and self-disclosing reflective thoughts is the teachable moment or, more exactly, the aesthetic event of good teaching and learning that modulates such moments. The rhythm of nature, human nature, and learning is the same. It is the endless process of growth and becoming through the creation of meaning (Garrison, 1997, p. 125).

The creation of a coaching intervention based on the phenomenological subjective experience of individual athletes is more than the design of a lesson or season plan. The epistemological foundation lies not only in Gill's "dance" but in the intuition, passion, and vulnerability of the coach/educator (Garrison, 1997). Jim Garrison believes that the basis of the educational relationship needs to be one of love or *Eros*. Within a classroom, or the pool, there exists an endless process of growth and, upon reflection, a creation of meaning for activity. The coach is a fundamental part of the experience of the athlete and, if successful, shares in both the tensions and the triumphs. Furthermore, if we are creating an intentional coaching plan the coach/researcher strives to share in teachable (coachable) moments to assist the athlete in her return to love of the activity.

...[S]tudents and teachers share feelings of doubt, intuit qualities simultaneously, and initiate inquiries concurrently. What sustains the teachable moment is their creative exploration of imaginary possibilities together (Garrison, 1997, p. 122).

Like Jerry Gill, Garrison posits that true teaching is shared feeling. For Garrison, however, this shared feeling occurs at a precognitive level. Simply, great teachers and coaches feel or intuit the mood and needs of their athletes. If they remain available and open to this precognitive qualitative background, they will be more prepared to meet the immediate needs of their charges (p. 118). Yet outcome-driven, realistic sport often clouds this intuition with the need for motor development and game management. The epistemological design of this intervention allows for coaches to read the feelings of their athletes through the process of the guided journals. Additionally, the athletes will experience the feelings of the coach through the written responses to their posts-thus, the dance continues. Garrison would see the value of these journals as the athletes' ability or attempt to "edit the texts of their lives" (p. 145).

To grow it is necessary to edit and amend the text of our lives. It requires critical reflection to recognize our selves by recognizing the roles our culture (sport) has prescribed for us as well as the unique stories we have begun to author for ourselves (pp. 145-146).

Journaling gives the athletes a voice³¹, connects them to their coach, and allows them to break away from the prescribed role that their sport has forced upon them now that they are at an elite level. Reflecting upon her past experience in her sport gives the athlete the ability to rewrite how she wants her story to be written. This regaining of control should assist the reflective athlete in alleviating levels of anxiety derived from her sporting experience.

For Garrison, love or *Eros* is the cornerstone of all quality educational experiences (Garrison, 1997). Most elite level athletes at some point in their youth, love the sport they played. This intentional coaching is meant to help athletes reflect upon the love of their sport. This cannot occur if love is not shared by the coach/educator/researcher.

³¹ For a discussion of the feminine voice specifically, see Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* (1982) or Mary Gentile's *Giving Voice to Values: How to Speak Your Mind When You Know What's Right* (2010).

Because we become what we love, because that is how people grow, educating Eros to desire the greatest good with the greatest passion should be the aspect of education that receives the greatest attention (p. 29).

Garrison's work is heavily steeped in the pragmatism of John Dewey (1948). Garrison and Dewey both acknowledge that teachers and students are all part of the learning experience in a joint venture of growth and discovery (Garrison, 1997). Yet, modern elite sports have created a rift in that relationship and athletes have been devalued as humans and are now seen as cogs in a greater machine. That machine, athletic department, or institution of higher learning is seen in the eyes of the NCAA Division I athlete as more important than the athletes themselves.

Finally, in order to create an intentional coaching intervention, the literature is clear that the coach/researcher needs to become not only a partner in the relationship but a vulnerable participant as well.

...[V]ulnerable teachers (coaches) are morally superior to safe, sure, and secure teachers. Vulnerable teachers are more perceptive. They are able to see the needs of the individual child and are more likely to respond for the best of all involved. Vulnerable teachers recognize unique persons and contexts and respond appropriately... [V]ulnerability leads to a virtue I will call "moral perception." It is the ability to see the unique needs, desires, and interests of our students in unique contexts and to respond to them with our own unique style to secure our students' best possibilities (Garrison, 1997, p. 19).

An integral part of the research design of this intervention (to be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Three) is that the coach/researcher takes an active role in leading the phenomenological reflection in each weekly module. The coach begins by relating the weekly topic of reflection to his own experience with the sport. This vulnerability and connection, for Garrison, allows the coach to be able to respond to the unique and subjective experience of his athlete. More pragmatically, this vulnerability makes the coach human and bridges the chasm created by outcome-driven elite sport.

Gill (1993) and Garrison (1997) set the epistemological foundation for the creation of a new coaching pedagogy based on the subjective lived experience of the individual.

Lickona (1991) further allows for additional strategies of role-modeling and storytelling in the design of the weekly coaching modules. Expanding on Harvard Psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg, who constructed a "...[t]ypology of definite and universal levels of development in moral thought" (Kohlberg, 1981, p. 16), moral educator Thomas Lickona created a more practical application of character development in the classroom with his positing of Moral Knowing, Moral Feeling, and Moral Action (Lickona, 1991). While moral development is not the focus of this current intervention, Lickona's pedagogy concerning the importance of role-modeling and storytelling are integral components to the design of the intentional coaching (Lickona, 1991, p. 80). Like Gill and Garrison, Lickona also posits the paramount importance of teacher as caregiver in the cognitive development of their students. Lickona states that teachers or coaches can serve as caregivers, moral models, and ethical mentors if they:

- 1) Avoid Favoritism
- 2) Treat their students with respect
- 3) Combine good example and direct moral teaching
- 4) Mentor one-on-one (Lickona, 1991, p. 80)

With the research design of this coaching pedagogy, the literature supports giving the athletes a voice through the reflective journals illustrating an environment of equity and inclusion. Each journal entry is valued and is as important as her teammate's entry. Because the journals are responded to by the coach/researcher within twenty-four hours of submission, the athlete feels and intuits an understanding that she is respected, valued, and her experience is special. Furthermore, the coach/researcher's introduction to the weekly reflection topic illustrates a positive example due to the personal link and connection. Finally, the intimate conversation and direct line of communication allows for one-on-one mentoring to occur.

Lickona (1991) also embraces storytelling as an extremely important technique in the moral development of students.

Stories, read or told, have always been among the favorite teaching instruments of the world's great moral educators. Stories teach by attraction rather than compulsion; they invite rather than impose. They capture the imagination and touch the heart. All of us have experienced the power of a good story to stir strong feelings. That's why storytelling is such a natural

way to engage and develop the emotional side of a child's character (pp. 79-81).

Throughout the twelve-week intentional coaching intervention, storytelling by the coach/researcher is an integral component to the weekly module. If the weekly module begins with a topic of subjective experience, the Wednesday of the week calls for "story-time." The telling of a story, through recitation of the written word, not only captures the imagination, as described by Lickona (1991), but also creates an intimate connection between coach/researcher and his team.

Specific examples of storytelling

Drawing on Lickona's (1991) belief that storytelling is a paramount component of the educational process, this twelve-week intervention builds on the literature and features a weekly reading that is not only steeped in the philosophical foundation inherent in the epistemological approach but also allows the coach/educator/researcher to bracket the athlete's subjective experience and bring them back to her initial love of her sport.³²

Learning to swim

The first reading presented in this study is from Bonnie Tsui's *Why We Swim* (2020). While not entirely a phenomenological account, Tsui's firsthand description of what draws her to the water, her historical backdrop, and her narrative approach allows the researcher/coach to begin a discussion of why the treatment group may have been drawn to the water as well.

Becoming a swimmer

The reading for the second week of the intervention is taken from Wacquant's *Body & Soul* (2004). Begun as a sociological study, Wacquant's journey into becoming a boxer is closer to true phenomenology than most works of this kind. Wacquant's description of life in a gym have striking parallels to that of life in a pool. This reading is meant to take the subject from her reflection on learning to swim to the moment when her identity became one linked directly to *being* a swimmer.

³² The idea of bracketing is an essential part of phenomenology that allows the subject to get to the thing in itself (Husserl, 1962, 1975).

The Daily Dance or Sometimes Grind

The weekly reading for the third week of the intervention is taken from Saint Sing's *Spirituality of Sport* (2004). Saint Sing's background of athlete, coach, academic, and theologian presents a unique opportunity to show the deeper levels of sport and how something mundane can be beautiful as well. The specific reading describes a coach watching her athletes on a final day of practice. The description is meant to illuminate the interplay of athlete, coach, sport, boat, substance, object and the spiritual (Saint Sing, 2004).

Playing in the Water

The first three weeks of the intervention are meant to establish a bracketed experience (Husserl, 1962) of being-in-the-water, becoming a swimmer--and the identity created, and finally the interplay of the daily activity and the struggle to avoid the mundane (Saint Sing, 2004; Tsui, 2020; Wacquant, 2004). In week four, the researcher/coach employs the work of sport philosopher Carolyn Thomas (1983) for her definition of play. Thomas's work allows the researcher to stimulate a discussion about whether elite sport must become work-like for it to be serious. Additionally, Thomas's work questions the inherent value of play and questions how these Division I swimmers might find their sporting activity playful despite it being at an elite level.

Control

The reading for the fifth week of the intervention comes from philosopher Aaron James (2017). James is not only a philosophy professor but an avid surfer who utilizes the philosophical foundation of the works of existentialist Jean-Paul Sartre (1956) and juxtaposes them with riding a wave. James details how a surfer cannot control a wave and yet becomes "... [e]ffectual in a relative powerlessness before a sublime ocean (James, 2017, p. 66). The researcher/coach employs the work of James for swimmers because of the understanding of water and its power. This example again leads to a bracketing of their subjective experience in the medium.

Flow

This midpoint or week six of the intervention presents the psychological concept of flow states or optimal performance (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Yet the work of Csikszentmihalyi (1990), while important, could be somewhat inaccessible for the desired effect of the reflection. Thus, the researcher/coach takes an eloquent descriptive narrative

from Basketball Hall of Famer Bill Russell (and historian Taylor Branch) (Russell & Branch, 1979) to describe what it may feel like to enter a flow state. Russell's dialogue presents an idea that optimal performance is not about the outcome but about an ontological state of *being* (1979).

Sweet tension of uncertainty

R. Scott Kretchmar (1975, 1994) popularized the Fraleigh's (1984) term "sweet tension of uncertainty" as one of the desired feelings that draws athletes to both contests and tests. Yet the reading from week seven of the intervention is taken from the unpublished dissertation of Wharton (2004). Wharton, a runner, coach, and academic, created a phenomenological descriptive narrative of his life's journey through running, through heartache and abuse, and throughout the writing of a dissertation (2004). This reading allows the researcher/coach to again give an example of how running into the unknown can be a beautiful experience. The example of the unknown allows a departure point for a bracketed reflection on that specific subjective experience and the feelings of anxiety it may create.

Relationship with coach

While the goal of this intentional coaching intervention is to stimulate reflection on a bracketed and authentic subjective experience, sport does not happen in a vacuum and relationships with others is also part of the overall journey. One of the closest relationships an athlete will have is with a coach. The works of Gill (1993), Garrison (1997), and Lickona (1991) illustrate the importance of the role of educator/coach in the development of a student/athlete. Gill's epistemological metaphor of the educational dance between knowers, knowing, and the known is the philosophical foundation for this intervention (Gill, 1993). Needing a more accessible example to stimulate reflection, week eight begins with a passage taken from Karrem Abdul-Jabbar's memoir of his fifty year relationship to renowned Coach John Wooden (Abdul-Jabbar, 2017). Abdul-Jabbar's description of his lived experience is put once again into the context of Gill's metaphor of the symbiotic dance between knowers--with coach being just a more experienced knower (Gill, 1993). Simply this prompt is meant to show that while the personal experience is important, interpersonal relationships influence the authentic lived experience in sport as well.

Relationship with a team

Week nine's topic of reflection is about the personal relationship one develops with a team. Beginning with a quote from the Christian theologian Stanley Hauerwas (Hauerwas, 1981), the idea of team is compared to that of a moral community. The work of Hauerwas presents the idea that *being* on a team is more than simply being a part of something devoted to wins and avoiding losses. Again an accessible example of a moral community is needed to extend Hauerwas's thesis. The bestselling trade book which chronicled the journey of an amateur Olympic crew team from the University of Washington in 1936, *Boys in the Boat* (Brown, 2014), presents a poignant example of how nine members in a crew boat, while different, must all assume their own personal roles if the boat will move the way in which it is meant to. When this occurs, the nine members and the boat cannot be distinguished from one another.

Relationship with competition

When discussing competition in week ten, John Wooden, coach of ten national championship basketball teams, is employed (Wooden & Jameson, 2005). Instead of reading from Wooden's definition of success, a visual medium is utilized to attempt to stimulate more reflection and to break away from the nine weeks of readings. Wooden's Ted Talk (Wooden, 2009), gives the research/coach another way to present the material beyond reading from a text. Wooden also serves as an example of how winning and success do not have to be the same thing and both can still be important.

Joy and happiness

The twelve-week intervention is constructed with both readings that are conducted by the researcher/coach and passages requoted before the directed journal prompts. Often these readings and prompts are from different sources, the readings often more accessible for discussion and reflection—the prompts often more academic. The penultimate week of the intervention uses Csikszentmihalyi's *Flow* (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), describing how a flow state can bring about some of the most memorable moments in a person's life. The directed reading from week eleven is from the popular selling *Why We Swim* (Tsui, 2020). The use of Tsui in the final weeks is meant to remind the treatment group of where they started their reflected journey in week number one.

Truth and essence

The ultimate goal of any phenomenological exploration is to get to the thing-in-itself or the true essence of the experience. The final week of the intervention begins with a quote from Maurice Merleau-Ponty, upon which the philosophical foundation of the treatment is based (1962, 1964). Merleau-Ponty's passage is meant to redirect the athlete to consider that her experience in her sport has deep meaning on an ontological level. It has value and it has purpose. Ending the intervention with the philosophical work upon which the idea was formed brings the treatment group full circle in their lived subjective experience.

Asking the Right Questions-Leading Down the Path

With the establishment of the epistemological dance of the knower, the knowing, and the known (Gill, 1993), the reliance on intuition and love (Garrison, 1997), and the need for role-modeling and storytelling (Lickona (1991), a coaching intervention that focuses on the ontological experience of the individual needs to establish a methodology of questioning to allow for guided reflection and growth (Reimer, Paolitto, & Hersh, 1983; Stoll, Beller, & Hahm, 2004).

Questioning, or so-called probing, which is open-ended...[i]nvites respondents to explore their reasoning. Effective questions are important because they help to stretch the students' thinking. These questions invite students to explore the reasons behind their opinions and to interact with their classmates in a way that challenges their own pattern of thinking.

Specifically, the 'right' questions can stimulate cognitive conflict...(Reimer et al., 1983, p. 155).

The pedagogical foundation for this intentional coaching intervention begins with Gill's understanding of the symbiotic relationship between the knower, knowing and the known (Gill, 1993). The vulnerability, intuition, and eros of the coach/researcher, described by Garrison, fosters an environment of care and openness conducive to thoughtful reflection (Garrison, 1997). Furthermore, the coach/researcher needs to role-model behavior and connect the weekly reflection themes through the strategy of storytelling (Lickona, 1991). Perhaps the most important component for effective intentional coaching is the ability to ask the appropriate questions to stimulate cognitive dissonance and thoughtful reflection concerning the subjective lived experience of the athlete. Concerning themselves primarily

with the design of a moral education pedagogy, Reimer, Paolitto, and Hersh (1983) establish a methodology for questioning students in a manner that promotes moral growth.³³

Character education and moral development is not the goal of this intentional coaching intervention. However, the questioning technique employed by moral educators of higher order, open-ended questions, has a purpose of leading a student toward greater cognitive reflection and development (Piper, Gentile, & Parks, 1993; Reimer, et al., 1983; Stoll & Beller, 1998; Stoll, Beller, & Hahm, 2004).³⁴

Initial Questioning Strategy

During the design of the weekly modules for the intentional coaching intervention, the need to develop the appropriate strategy for questioning the athletes arose. The initial strategy involved in this process is as follows (Reimer, et al., 1983, pp. 154-177):

- 1) Reinforce to the athlete that they are thoughtful reasoners
- 2) Assist the athlete in articulating the elements of the reflection topic
- 3) Ensure the athlete understands the reflection topic
- 4) Understand the true phenomenological reflection requires risk taking and vulnerability
- 5) Understand the value of “why” questions
- 6) Develop personal and naturalistic examples

Finally, the questions developed for the prompted weekly journals while not necessarily meant to create cognitive conflict to promote moral growth, they were designed to create conflict in how the athlete currently views her sporting experience. The basis for these prompts is modeled on the five kind of in-depth probing questions of

- Clarifying probe
- Issue-specific probe
- Inter-issue probe
- Role-switch probe
- Universal-consequence probe (Reimer, et al., 1983, p. 164)

³³ Reimer, Paolitto and Hersh (1983) base their methodology and pedagogy on the cognitive development theory and stages of moral growth developed by Piaget and Harvard psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg (1981). While this current study did not directly measure moral development or moral reasoning, the methodology relies heavily on the need for reflection.

³⁴ This technique of higher order questioning has been used with great effectiveness in the Center for ETHICS* at the University of Idaho and at the Harvard Business School alike (Stoll & Beller, 1998; Piper, et al., 1993).

In sum, not all five probing techniques need to be used to stimulate reflection but the process of guiding the reflection remains tied to higher order cognitive reasoning.

Furthermore, the twelve one-week modules created for this intentional coaching intervention is firmly rooted in the question-answer approach of the Stoll-Beller-Hahm Maieutic Standard (SBH) (Stoll, Beller, & Hahm, 2004).

[T]he instructor challenges the embodied participants to argue, question, and discuss an issue and all its collateral fibers and understand the ramifications of all possible action. The method, resembling Socratic, uses discussions and questions which encourages participants to critique their own beliefs as well as the beliefs of others. The discussion forces the participant to read, write, speak, and listen (p. 11).

While differences in this current intervention and the SBH method exist, the overarching theme of higher order questions, reading, writing, and reflecting serves as the motive force behind the attempt to alleviate trait anxiety among NCAA Division I female swimmers.

Trait Anxiety and Coping Skills

The establishment and creation of a new coaching pedagogy is based on the understanding that paying attention to the individual lived experience of the athlete may lead to a healthier relationship with her sport and ultimately a reduction in trait anxiety and an increase in ability to cope. The creation of this coaching intervention came from the description of the tragic death of Maddison Halloran by journalist Kate Fagan (2017). While this intentional coaching intervention is rooted heavily in the philosophical foundations of phenomenology (Husserl, 1962, 1975; Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 1964), the need to objectively measure changes in trait anxiety and athletic coping skills will ideally illustrate the overall effectiveness of this approach. Fagan (2017) begins by setting our problem.

No logic existed to explain how Maddy's buoyancy, her spirit—eighteen years in the making—could be extinguished in one moment. Think of all the life that had been breathed into her: the hugs, the laughter, the birthday parties with friends, the Saturday morning car rides to soccer practice, the juice boxes and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches with the crusts cut off, the tears, the stern words, the I love yous, the endless list of things done for every loved

child. So much energy poured into one being: their daughter. This love, in bodily form, could not be erased from the world so quickly, could it? (p. 290)

The genesis of this intentional coaching intervention occurred upon the cover-to-cover reading of Kate Fagan's discussion of the tragic death of University of Pennsylvania freshman track athlete Maddison Halloran (Fagan, 2017). On the surface, Halloran appeared to be a happy, intelligent, Ivy League athlete. Underneath, mental illness, depression, and anxiety led Halloran to take her own life from the ninth floor of a downtown parking garage. Halloran's coaches, friends, and family all made attempts to help her with her struggle with the mounting pressures of being a college athlete. She had a support structure that appeared to want to give her assistance in her time of need. This support structure was not enough.

According to Cox, Martens, and Russell, anxiety is among the most commonly measured constructs in sports psychology (2003). Rainer Martens, Robin Vealy, and Damon Burton retooled a scale measuring the state level of competitive anxiety CSAI-2 (Martens, Vealy, & Burton, 1990) and is regarded as perhaps the most well-known anxiety instrument in sport psychology research (Cox, Martin & Russell, 2003, p. 519). It is important to understand the difference between state and trait anxiety. The debate and exploration of sport anxiety began in the 1950s with Spielberger (1966) clarifying this distinction the following decade (as cited in Martens et al., 1990).

According to Spielberger, *state anxiety* refers to an existing or immediate emotional state characterized by apprehension and tension. *Trait anxiety* is a predisposition to perceive certain situations as threatening and to respond to these situations with varying levels of state anxiety (Spielberger, 1966, as cited in Martens, Vealey, & Burton, 1990, p. 5).

The trait anxiety of an athlete is a predisposition of an individual to perceive more things as threatening or a danger. If an athlete has a high level of trait anxiety she will respond to a situation with higher levels of state anxiety in that given moment (Martens et al., 1990, p. 5).

In 1990, Smith, Smoll, and Schultz saw a need to develop an instrument to measure levels of trait anxiety in a sport setting. The Sport Anxiety Scale (SAS) addresses this need for a multidimensional measure (Smith, et al., 1990) which was retooled again as the (SAS-2) in 2006-- the instrument used within this coaching intervention (Smith, et al., 2006). Smith, Smoll, and Cumming further explored the promotion of a mastery-based motivational

coaching climate to counteract high levels of anxiety in young athletes (Smith, et al., 2007). For Smith et. al, creating a mastery focused environment promotes an idea of controlling effort and skill development and moves athletes away from a focus of uncontrollable outcome (pp. 39-40). Simply, sport psychology research supports an idea that shifting from an outcome driven environment to an environment focused on mastery will reduce levels of trait anxiety in young athletes (2007). This current coaching intervention pedagogy is built on this understanding that redirecting athletes toward a guided reflection on their initial and subjective lived experience with her sport will have a similar affect.

Burton and Raedeke describe coping strategies or skills as "...[t]he techniques that athletes use to deal with problems and to feel better emotionally in order to perform well in demanding competitive situations" (Burton & Raedeke, 2008, p. 171). Smith et al., believe that one of the best ways to evaluate whether a sport performance enhancement program is effective is to measure the development of these psychological skills (Smith, et al., 1995). The Athletic Coping Skills Inventory-28 is a 28 item scale developed in 1995 designed to measure individual difference in coping skills in a sport context. According to Smith et al., the ACSI-28

...[w]as developed by means of a psychometric strategy that involved the use of a confirmatory factor analysis to derive subscales that conformed closely to an underlying structural model of psychological skills (p. 381).

If this current intentional coaching intervention has to desired affect of reducing levels of trait anxiety in a sport setting, research indicates that the athletes' abilities to cope with stressful situations should increase as well (Creswell & Hodge, 2004; Smith et al., 1995). Furthermore, the ACSI-28 will illustrate the efficacy of the intervention on an additional valid and reliable instrument.

Chapter Three

Problem Statement³⁵

The purpose of this quasi-experimental study using a pretest/posttest four group design, was to examine the effect of a twelve-week systematic intentional coaching education with an epistemological existential methodology on the mental health and well-being of athletes as measured by levels of trait anxiety and athletic coping skills.

Sub-Problems³⁶

Trait Anxiety

- TA1. What difference exists pre to posttest between experimental group one and experimental group two in levels of trait anxiety among Division I female swimmers?
- TA2. What difference exists pre to posttest between experimental one and control group one in levels of trait anxiety among Division I female swimmers?
- TA3. What difference exists pre to posttest between experimental group one and control group two in levels of trait anxiety among Division I female swimmers?
- TA4. What difference exists pre to posttest between experimental group two and control group one in levels of trait anxiety among Division I female swimmers?
- TA5. What difference exists pre to posttest between experimental group two and control group two in levels of trait anxiety among Division I female swimmers?
- TA6. What difference exists pre to posttest between control group one and control group two in levels of trait anxiety among Division I female swimmers?
- TA7. What difference exists pre to posttest between combined experimental group and combined control group in levels of trait anxiety among Division I female swimmers?

Athletic Coping Skills

- CS8. What difference exists pre to posttest between experimental group one and experimental group two in athletic coping skills among Division I female swimmers?
- CS9. What difference exists pre to posttest between experimental group one and control group one in athletic coping skills among Division I female swimmers?

³⁵ This is the original problem statement approved by the dissertation committee. The updated and amended problem statement will be addressed in the final three chapters.

³⁶ These are the original sub-problems which are amended in the final three chapters.

- CS10. What difference exists pre to posttest between experimental group one and control group two in athletic coping skills among Division I female swimmers?
- CS11. What difference exists pre to posttest between experimental group two and control group one in athletic coping skills among Division I female swimmers?
- CS12. What difference exists pre to posttest between experimental group two and control group two in athletic coping skills among Division I female swimmers?
- CS13. What difference exists pre to posttest between control group one and control group two in athletic coping skills among Division I female swimmers?
- CS14. What difference exists pre to posttest between combined experimental group and combined control group in athletic coping skills among Division I female swimmers?

Statistical hypotheses³⁷

Trait Anxiety

- TAHo1. No difference exists pre to posttest between experimental group one and experimental group two in levels of trait anxiety among Division I female swimmers.
- TAHo2. No difference exists pre to posttest between experimental one and control group one in levels of trait anxiety among Division I female swimmers.
- TAHo3. No difference exists pre to posttest between experimental group one and control group two in levels of trait anxiety among Division I female swimmers.
- TAHo4. No difference exists pre to posttest between experimental group two and control group one in levels of trait anxiety among Division I female swimmers.
- TAHo5. No difference exists pre to posttest between experimental group two and control group two in levels of trait anxiety of Division I female swimmers.
- TAHo6. No difference exists pre to posttest between control group one and control group two in levels of trait anxiety among Division I female swimmers.
- TAHo7. No difference exists pre to posttest between the combined experimental group and the combined controls group in levels of trait anxiety among Division I female swimmers.

³⁷ These are the original statistical hypotheses approved by the dissertation committee. The updated and amended hypotheses reflecting the change in problem statement and design will be addressed in the final three chapters.

Athletic Coping Skills

- CSHo8. No difference exists pre to posttest between experimental group one and experimental group two in athletic coping skills among Division I female swimmers.
- CSHo9. No difference exists pre to posttest between experimental group one and control group one in athletic coping skills among Division I female swimmers.
- CSHo10. No difference exists pre to posttest between experimental group one and control group two in athletic coping skills among Division I female swimmers.
- CSHo11. No difference exists pre to posttest between experimental group two and control group one in athletic coping skills among Division I female swimmers.
- CSHo12. No difference exists pre to posttest between experimental group two and control group two in athletic coping skills among Division I female swimmers.
- CSHo13. No difference exists pre to posttest between control group one and control group two in athletic coping skills among Division I female swimmers.
- CSHo14. No difference exists pre to posttest between the combined experimental group and the combined control group in athletic coping skills among Division I female swimmers.

Participants

All participants in this study were female identified NCAA Division I collegiate swimmers above the age of 18. The treatment group was selected from the same team of NCAA Division I swimmers. The control groups were selected from two different NCAA Division I female swimming teams. The coaches selected for observation all had over ten years of head coaching experience at the NCAA Division I level and are commonly regarded as representative of swim coaches at that level. Due to COVID-19 restrictions and limitations, the observation of the coaches could not occur, and this part of the study was suspended (see Appendix E).

Participant Selection

The participants in this study were a convenience experimental sample of twenty-eight female collegiate swimmers at the NCAA Division I level, split into two groups of “newcomers” and “returners” at a mid-major university located in the Northwest. A rationale existed for splitting the treatment group into two different groups to account for the exposure of the “returners” to the coaching style of the researcher/coach. The “newcomers,” while recruited by the researcher/coach, had not been exposed to the coaching style before arrival

on campus and participation in the study. These two groups will be explored further in Chapters Four, Five, and Six but for the treatment were considered one experimental group. This change in the original problem statement and design will be discussed in depth in Chapter Four. The control group, again a convenience sample, was comprised of female Division I swimmers at two different northwestern universities.

Institutional Review Board

Two different reviews were sought from the University of Idaho Institutional Review Board. First, the protocol for the systematic observation of coaching styles was approved as exempt under category 2 by the University of Idaho IRB 20-134. The intentional coaching intervention was also granted IRB approval by the University of Idaho, IRB 20-135. However, due to COVID-19 restrictions and limitations, the observation of the coaches could not occur, and this part of the study was suspended. (See Appendix A for IRB approval letters).

Informed Consent

All participants in the experimental group completed an informed consent form prior to completing the pre-test at the beginning of the study. The study was explained to the treatment group in the presence of the university athletic department athletic trainer in order to answer any questions or concerns about the intervention, as requested by the institution's athletic department. Both controls groups completed an informed consent form via Qualtrics prior to the completing the pre-test. The parameters of the study were explained to each control group via zoom meeting in the presence of the control groups' coaching staff. (See Appendix B for informed consent letter).

For the systematic coaching observation, all coaches would have completed an informed consent form prior to allow the researcher to observe coaching style. (See Appendix C for informed consent letter).

Intervention

Treatment Group

The existential coaching intervention is comprised of twelve, one-week educational coaching modules, designed to promote reflection on the subjective lived experience of the individual athlete through weekly philosophical prompts from coach/researcher. At the beginning of the treatment, the treatment group completed the Sport Anxiety Scale-2 (SAS-

2) and the Athletic Coping Skills Inventory-28 (ACSI-28) measuring levels of trait anxiety and coping skills in a sporting context respectively. The weekly modules guided the swimmer through a journey from the time she learned to swim and eventually arriving at the meaning and essence of her sport by week twelve. Each week was comprised of the same progression of pedagogical methodology. Monday was the introduction of the weekly topic by the coach/researcher in a casual lecture style format. This introduction to the topic put the weekly prompt into context and included a “personal” story from the coach as to how the topic related to his journey in the sport. The Wednesday of the teaching week devoted time to a reading that related closely to the reflection topic. This reading was presented aloud to the athletes guaranteeing that they were exposed to it. Additionally, the reading was posted to the intervention classroom website, *Your Subjective Lived Experience as a Swimmer*, on the University of Idaho’s bblearn platform for additional reference should the athlete need it or if she missed that training session. On Friday of the teaching week, the athletes broke into small peer discussion groups to further explore the weekly topic. Finally, on Saturday of the training week, the swimmers were given a guided reflection prompt and asked to respond in a journal format on the bblearn platform. On Sunday of the week, the coach/researcher replied to each individual journal entry. Each prompt began with a quote relating to the topic, listed several definitions and key ideas, summarized the weekly educational journey, and asked additional third order questions meant to stimulate thought, dissidence, and reflection on her “lived experience.” The weekly modules can be found in Appendix D.

Control Group

The control group in this study was also administered the SAS-2 and ACSI-28 to measure levels of trait anxiety and coping skills in an athletic context. The pre and posttest (SAS-2 & ACSI-28) were given as close to the same timeline as the treatment groups received which would be twelve weeks apart from each other. This three-month interval allowed for a long enough period of time so that the values obtained on the posttest should not have been influenced by having taken the test previously (Trochim et al., 2016).

Intervention

The weekly intervention topics comprising the treatment of intentional coaching are as follows:

Week One: *Learning to Swim*. This week's prompt began with a quote from Jerry Gill's *Learning to Learn* (Gill, 1993). Gill's concept of the epistemological dance between the knowing, the knower, and the known was introduced in week one and was a continual theme throughout the intervention. The weekly reading was taken from *Why We Swim* (Tsui, 2020), which is an account of the author's first-person journey into the sport.

Week Two: *Becoming a Swimmer*. This week's reflection began with a quote from Lois Wacquant's *Body & Soul* (Wacquant, 2004). Wacquant's account of "becoming" a boxer and the culture of the gym put becoming a swimmer into perspective. The Wednesday reading was a passage from Wacquant as well, beautifully describing life in a boxing gym.

Week Three: *The Daily Dance or Sometimes Grind*. This week's topic revisited Gill's epistemological metaphor of knowing through the symbiotic dance. The Wednesday reading was taken from Susan Saint Sing's *Spirituality of Sport* (Saint Sing, 2004). This reading detailed a crew coach watching two athletes' final day of practice on a lake. The description was meant to illustrate the interplay between coach, athlete, sport, boat, substance, and object.

Week Four: *Playing in the Water*. Week four's reflection began with a passage from Carolyn Thomas's *Sport in a Philosophical Context* (Thomas, 1983). The reading was also from Thomas and was meant to stimulate thought on when sport turns from play to work and does elite sport have to be seen as work-like for it to be considered serious.

Week Five: *Control*. The topic for the fifth week in the intervention concerned the concept of control in athletics and life. The prompt was introduced with a passage from Aaron James' *Surfing with Sartre* (James, 2017), detailing how a surfer cannot control a wave and yet becomes "...[e]ffectual in a relative powerlessness before a sublime ocean (James, 2017, p. 66). The Wednesday reading was also from James and was meant to illustrate how the best way to find control in a sporting context is to give up the need for it. The example used by the researcher/coach was the passive/active act of floating in the water (See Introduction in Chapter One for a description of the phenomenology of floating).

Week Six: *Flow*. The midpoint of the intervention presented the topic of flow to the athletes. Both the prompt and the reading for the week were taken from Boston Celtic legend and Hall of Famer Bill Russell's autobiography coauthored by historian Taylor Branch

(Russell & Branch, 1979). The important concept discussed in this week was that one cannot create flow but merely can create the conditions that are conducive for flow to occur.

Week Seven: *The Unknown: The Sweet Tension of Uncertainty*. The turning point of the twelve week intervention occurred when the topic of the “sweet tension of uncertainty” was introduced (Fraleigh, 1984; Kretchmar, 1975, 1994). The prompt began with a quote from the unpublished phenomenological dissertation by Jim Wharton (2004) which discussed the beauty of a long run into places where one has never been. The Wednesday reading was again from Wharton’s *Long Run* (2004) and was designed to stimulate reflection on how not knowing an outcome can be fulfilling instead of anxiety creating.

Week Eight: *Relationship with Coach*. The following three weeks of the treatment concerned relationships within the sporting experience. This was an important turn from the first seven weeks devoted to primarily one’s personal subjective experience. Week eight began with a passage taken from Kareem Abdul-Jabbar’s memoir of his fifty year relationship to Coach John Wooden (Abdul-Jabbar, 2017). The Wednesday reading was also from Abdul-Jabbar’s book which was put once again into the context of Gill’s metaphor of the symbiotic dance between knowers--the coach being just a more experienced knower (Gill, 1993). Simply this prompt was meant to show that while the personal experience is important, interpersonal relationships influence the authentic lived experience in sport as well.

Week Nine: *Relationship with Team*. Week nine’s topic of reflection was about the personal relationship one develops with a team. Beginning with a quote from the Christian theologian and moral educator Stanley Hauerwas (1981), the idea of team was compared to that of a moral community. The Wednesday reading was taken from the bestselling book, *Boys in the Boat* (Brown, 2013), which presented a moving example of how nine members in a crew boat, while different, must all assume their own personal roles if the boat will move the way in which it was meant. When this occurs, the nine members and the boat cannot be distinguished from one another, the boat, or the water itself (Brown, 2013).

Week Ten: *Relationship with Competition*. When discussing competition in Week Ten, John Wooden, coach of ten national championship basketball teams, was employed (Wooden & Jameson, 2005). Instead of reading from Wooden’s definition of success, the Wednesday discussion was a video of Coach Wooden narrating a Ted Talk through his

pyramid of success (Wooden, 2009). Week Ten's topic of reflection occurred the same week as the first competition for both treatment groups.

Week Eleven: *Joy and Happiness*. The final two weeks of reflections were meant to once again bring the athlete back to the existential condition of her intimate relationship with her sport. Week eleven's prompt passage was taken from Csikszentmihalyi's *Flow* (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), describing how flow states can bring about some of the most memorable moments in a person's life. The reading from this week returned to week one's book, *Why We Swim* (Tsui, 2020), to remind the treatment group why they entered the water in the first place.

Week Twelve: *Truth and Essence*. The final week of the intervention began with a quote from Maurice Merleau-Ponty, upon which the philosophical foundation of the treatment is primarily based (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 1964). Merleau-Ponty's passage was meant to redirect the athlete to consider that her experience in her sport has deep meaning on an ontological level. It has value and it has purpose. The readings for this final week were passages written by some of the participants throughout the three month intervention. Finally, the journal prompted the participants to find meaning in the twelve weeks of writing.

At the conclusion of Week Twelve of the coaching intervention, both treatment groups completed the SAS-2 and ACSI-28 and the scores were compared to the pretest. These results will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

Instruments

***Sport Anxiety Scale-2 (SAS-2)*³⁸**

In 1990, Smith, Smoll, and Schultz saw a need to develop an instrument to measure levels of trait anxiety in a sport setting. The Sport Anxiety Scale (SAS) addressed this need for a multidimensional measure (Smith, et al., 1990) which was retooled again as the (SAS-2) in 2006-- the instrument used within this coaching intervention (Smith, et al., 2006). The SAS-2 is a 15 item instrument consisting of 3 subscales of 5 items a piece. Each item is tested on a 4 point Likert scale measuring how often an athlete may feel anxious in an athletic situation (1=not at all, 4=very much). Thus a score of 5 on one of the three subscales

³⁸ The SAS-2 can be found in Appendix G.

would equate to no trait anxiety whereas a score of 20 would be the highest level of anxiety an athlete could feel. Total scores for the instrument would therefore range from 15-no anxiety to 60-maximum level of trait anxiety (Smith, Smoll, Cumming, & Grossbard, 2006). In a 2006 study Smith, Smoll, Cumming, & Grossband tested over 1,000 young athletes ranging in age from 9 years old to college aged and found that trait anxiety increased as athletes grew older with an average score of the college aged sample of 28.83 (Smith et al., 2006). Smith, Smoll, and Cumming further explored the promotion of a mastery-based motivational coaching climate to counteract high levels of anxiety in young athletes (Smith, Smoll, & Cumming, 2007). For Smith et al., creating a mastery focused environment promotes an idea of controlling effort and skill development and moves athletes away from a focus of uncontrollable outcome (Smith, et al., 2007, pp. 39-40). Simply, sport psychology research supports an idea that shifting from an outcome driven environment to an environment focused on mastery will reduce levels of trait anxiety in young athletes (2007). This current coaching intervention pedagogy is built on this understanding that redirecting athletes toward a guided reflection on their initial and subjective lived experience with her sport will have a similar affect. In the current study the SAS-2 had a pretest Cronbach Alpha score of .92 and a posttest Cronbach Alpha score of .91.

Athletic Coping Skills Inventory-28 (ACSI-28)³⁹

The Athletic Coping Skills Inventory-28 is a 28 item scale developed in 1995 designed to measure individual difference in coping skills in a sport context. According to Smith et al., the ACSI-28

...[w]as developed by means of a psychometric strategy that involved the use of a confirmatory factor analysis to derive subscales that conformed closely to an underlying structural model of psychological skills (Smith, et al., 1995, p. 381).

The 28 item instrument is measured on a 4-point Likert scale with seven subscales each consisting of 4 items a piece. The literature and implementation of the ACSI-28 have differed in scoring. In the original version of the ACSI-28 instrument, each item was a four-point Likert scale measuring how often an athlete felt a certain way in a sport setting (0=almost never, 3=almost always). The instrument also consisted of six reversal items (questions 3, 7, 10, 12, 19, and 23) (Smith et al., 1995). This current study utilized a version

³⁹ The ACSI-28 can be found in Appendix H.

of the ACSI-28 where each item was scored on a four-point Likert scale measuring how often an athlete felt a certain way in a sport setting (1=almost never, 4=almost always). In 2007, Shannon von Guenther and John Hammermeister surveyed 142 collegiate athletes to explore the relationship between wellness and performance using the same scoring as this current study (Von Guenther & Hammermeister, 2007). When utilizing this scoring, each of the seven subscales could have a possible score ranging from 4-16 with an overall score ranging from 28-112. Because differences in scoring appear in the literature, comparisons between studies become convoluted. However, if this current intentional coaching intervention had the desired affect of reducing levels of trait anxiety in a sport setting, research indicates that the athletes' abilities to cope with stressful situations should increase as well (Creswell & Hodge, 2004; Smith, et al., 1995). Furthermore, the ACSI-28 illustrated the efficacy of the intervention as an additional valid and reliable instrument. In the current study the ACSI-28 had a pretest Cronbach Alpha score of .88 and a posttest Cronbach Alpha score of .89.

Procedure

The members of three Division I women's swimming teams which comprise two different control groups and two treatment groups (newcomers and returners), completed a pre and posttest of the Sport Anxiety Scale-2 (SAS-2) and the Athletic Coping Skills Inventory-28 (ACSI-28) at the beginning and end of a twelve-week period. Both treatment groups were drawn from the same women's swimming team. The first treatment group was comprised of seasoned athletes who have been exposed to the coaching style of researcher/coach. The second treatment group was comprised of "newcomers" who have yet to be directly coached by the researcher/coach but are familiar with his style due to the NCAA recruiting process. Both treatment groups underwent a twelve-week systematic, existential coaching program that included a new topic for philosophic reflection each week. Each week the treatment groups received an introductory lecture/story, a weekly reading, small peer group discussions or activities, and were asked to write a prompted reflection journal. The coach/researcher responded to each journal entry giving the athlete a direct line of communication to the coach as well as an autonomous voice. At the conclusion of the twelve weeks, both control groups were asked to complete a posttest of the SAS-2 and ACSI-28 through a team zoom meeting led by the coaching staff of each team. This meeting was followed with reminder emails to

complete the posttests. The two treatment groups completed the posttests of the SAS-2 and ACSI-28 at the conclusion of the final Saturday practice of week twelve under the direction of coach/researcher.

The observational study on coaching needed to be suspended for this study due to COVID-19 restrictions and logistics (See Appendix E).

Design⁴⁰

The design of this study was a pretest/posttest four group design using a convenience sample of NCAA Division I female swimmers meant to study the effectiveness of a twelve-week systematic intentional coaching intervention with an epistemological existential methodology on the mental health and well-being of athletes as measured by levels of trait anxiety and athletic coping skills. First, in order to quantify the effectiveness of the intentional coaching two measurement tools designed to tests athletes' levels of trait anxiety and coping skills (SAS-2 and ACSI-28) were needed to be employed. Second, twelve one-week coaching modules based on educational theory and phenomenological methodology needed to be created and administered by coach/researcher. The pretest/posttest design is as follows (See Table 1).

Table 1⁴¹

Four Group Pretest/Posttest Design

O1—Pretest	T1.	O2—Posttest
O3—Pretest	T1.	O4—Posttest
O5—Pretest		O6—Posttest
O7—Pretest		O8—Posttest

Line 1 T1 = Treatment group (returners) receiving SAS-2 and ACSI-28 and twelve-week intentional coaching intervention.

Line 2 T2 = Treatment group (newcomers) receiving SAS-2 and ACSI-28 and twelve-week intentional coaching intervention.

Line 3 C1 = Control group one receiving SAS-2 and ACSI-28

Line 4 C2 = Control group two receiving SAS-2 and ACSI-28

⁴⁰ This is a description of the original four-group design approved by the dissertation committee. The amended and simplified design is addressed at length in Chapters Four-Six.

⁴¹ The amended design will be addressed in Chapter Four.

Data Analysis⁴²

A split plot repeated measures ANOVA was employed for this study using SPSS (version 26) for the analysis of the data. Comparisons were made between treatment groups, between each treatment group and each control group, and between entire treatment group and entire control group. Alpha was set at $p < .05$.

Variables

The independent variable for this study was the twelve-week systematic existential coaching intervention. The two dependent variables were the pretest and posttest scores of the SAS-2 and the ACSI-28. The independent variable will be paired with each dependent variable (See Table 2).

Table 2

Variables

Independent variable: Twelve-week coaching intervention

Dependent variable 1: athletes' responses to pretest and posttest SAS-2 measuring trait anxiety

Dependent variable 2: athlete's responses to pretest and posttest ACSI-28 measuring coping

⁴² Upon the completion of data collection and analysis, the principal investigator decided to conduct further exploratory results which will be discussed at length in Chapter Six.

Chapter Four: Results

Problem Statement⁴³

The purpose of this quasi-experimental study using a pretest/posttest four group design, was to examine the effect of a twelve-week systematic intentional coaching education with an epistemological existential methodology on the mental health and well-being of athletes as measured by levels of trait anxiety and athletic coping skills.

Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to report the quantitative results to the sub-problems explained in Chapter One and to introduce the qualitative results from the weekly phenomenological journal entries created by the treatment group.

Descriptive Statistics

The participants in this study were a convenience experimental sample of twenty-eight female collegiate swimmers at a NCAA Division I mid-major university located in the Pacific Northwest. Due to attrition and two failures to complete posttests, the sample size of the treatment group was reduced to 23. A control group of female Division I swimmers at two different northwestern universities was used. This control group was comprised of 27 total athletes. All participants in this study were female Division I collegiate swimmers above the age of 18.

Data Collected and Cleaned

Quantitative data was collected from both the pretest and posttests via Qualtrics. The raw data was pulled, cleaned, and sorted into four different groups to match results more easily among participants. The four groups consisted of two treatment groups of newcomers and returners and two control groups from different Division I women's swimming teams. The raw data was then transferred to an excel spreadsheet and color coded for reference. The treatment group of newcomers was coded orange, the returner treatment group was coded yellow, the first control group was coded red, and the second control group was colored green. All responses were then converted to numbers on a four-point Likert scale. Six items on the ACSI-28 (items #'s 3,7,10,12, 19, and 23) were deemed reversal items and the scores were adjusted appropriately. Respondent random generated ID numbers were changed to

⁴³ This is the original problem statement approved by dissertation committee. The change in design will be addressed later in this chapter and the problem statement will be amended accordingly.

two digits for easier reference and were matched with their pre to posttest scores from both instruments. After the data cleaning, five cases were removed due to no posttest score for either the SAS-2 or ACSI-28.

At this point, the research team consisting of the principal investigator, major professor, and measurement consultant examined the cleaned data and the original problem statement and discovered a potential problem prior to running the data for results. Due to restrictions of COVID-19 and the loss of 9% after posttests it appeared that the sample sizes of four groups would potentially limit the strength and significance of any results. Understanding that both control groups received no intervention and both treatment groups received the exact same treatment a decision was made to examine the results of two groups instead of the original four. The change from a four group to a two-group design did not change the integrity of the study and allowed for an increased sample size of both the treatment and control groups (N=23, N=27). This decision was made prior to the data being run and doctoral committee members were notified of the change. After the two-group design was agreed upon, it was decided that exploratory results of the four groups would still be examined later and would be discussed in Chapter Six for further implications. Results would be examined for change over time between both treatment groups consisting of newcomers to the program compared to athletes who had experienced the coaching style of the researcher/coach in previous seasons. Additionally, the principal investigator decided to use targeted variables for further analysis based on the subscales of both instruments which will also be discussed further in Chapter Six. The two targeted variables from the SAS-2 were freedom from worry and concentration disruption. The four targeted variables from the ACSI-28 were coachability, coping with adversity, freedom from worry, and concentration disruption. A repeated measures ANOVA was run on each sub-scale to determine differences over time between groups using SPSS version 26. Finally, a split plot repeated measures ANOVA was run on the data from the two groups (Treatment and Control) to explore the difference with the interaction on time between groups from pretest and posttest on both levels of trait anxiety and athletic coping skills.

New Research Design

Table 3

Two Group Pretest/Posttest Design

O1—Pretest	T1.	O2—Posttest
O3—Pretest		O4—Posttest

Line 1 T1 = Treatment group receiving SAS-2 and ACSI-28 and twelve-week intentional coaching intervention

Line 2 C1 = Control group receiving SAS-2 and ACSI-28 and no intervention

Qualitative Responses

A substantial amount of subject data was also collected from the treatment group in the form of weekly journal entries. These entries were gathered on the bblearn⁴⁴ portal and were then transferred to a word document. In total over 100,000 words were written by the treatment group with an average weekly response of over 500 words. This subjective data will be used to inform the quantitative results and will be discussed in detail in Chapter Five. While the data collected by the SAS-2 and ACSI-28 is important, the subjective data gathered will illustrate, in the first-person voice of the treatment group athlete, the power of phenomenological reduction, bracketing, and epochè in establishing personal meaning. Further implications of the importance of the phenomenological methodology and replicability of subjective results will be discussed in Chapter Six.

Statistical Sub-Problems⁴⁵

Sub-Problem 1

Trait Anxiety

TA1. What difference exists pre to posttest between treatment group and control group in levels of trait anxiety among NCAA Division I female swimmer?

Statistical Hypothesis 1

Trait Anxiety

TAHo1. No difference exists pre to posttest between treatment group and control group in levels of trait anxiety among NCAA Division I female swimmers.

⁴⁴ BBlearn was the online learning portal supported by the treatment group's university at the time of the study.

⁴⁵ The following are amended sub-problems and statistical hypotheses based on a two-group pre/posttest research design.

A significant difference was found with the interaction of Time X Group on trait anxiety scores in female NCAA swimmers after a 12-week intentional coaching intervention Wilk's Lambda $F(1, 48) = 8.39, p < .034, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .09$. Treatment group trait anxiety scores decreased from a pretest score of 35.0 ± 1.7 to posttest score of 30.8 ± 1.6 , while control group trait anxiety scores remained the same from pretest 35.2 ± 1.6 to posttest 34.6 ± 1.5 . (See Table 4).

Table 4

Difference Over Time Between Groups on Trait Anxiety

	Pretest Mean	SD	Posttest Mean	SD
Treatment Group	35.0 _a	1.7	30.8 _b	1.6
Control Group	35.2 _a	1.6	34.6 _a	1.5

Note 1. Means with different subscripts differ significantly at $p \leq .05$.

Sub-Problem 2

Coping Skills

C2. What difference exists pre to posttest between treatment group and control group in athletic coping skills among NCAA Division I female swimmer?

Statistical Hypothesis 2

Coping Skills

Ho2. No difference exists pre to posttest between experimental group and control group in athletic coping skills among Division I female swimmers.

Results were approaching significance with the interaction of Time X Group on coping skills after a 12-week coaching intervention, Wilk's Lambda $F(1, 48) = 3.28, p < .056, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .074$. Treatment group scores increased from a pretest score of 70.48 ± 2.4 to posttest score of 75.57 ± 2.3 . Control group scores remained the same from pretest 69.70 ± 2.2 to posttest 70.22 ± 2.5 . (See Table 5).

Table 5*Difference Over Time Between Groups on Coping Skills*

	Pretest Mean	SD	Posttest Mean	SD
Treatment Group	70.48 _a	2.2	75.57 _a	2.5
Control Group	69.70 _a	2.4	70.22 _a	2.3

Note 1. Means with different subscripts differ significantly at $p < .05$ level.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Problem Statement⁴⁶

The purpose of this quasi-experimental study using a pretest/posttest two group design, is to examine the effect of a twelve-week systematic intentional coaching education with an epistemological existential methodology on the mental health and well-being of athletes as measured by levels of trait anxiety and athletic coping skills.

Introduction⁴⁷

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the results of the twelve-week intentional coaching intervention as reported in the previous chapter. The results are examined in relation to the statistical hypotheses and the overall problem statement. The purpose of this quasi-experimental study using a pretest/posttest two group design, is to examine the effect of a twelve-week systematic intentional coaching education with an epistemological existential methodology on the mental health and well-being of athletes as measured by levels of trait anxiety and athletic coping skills. Quantitative data was collected via Qualtrics from both the SAS-2 and ACSI-28 and inferences were made based on those results. Qualitative data collected from treatment journals will further inform these results and will be discussed later in this chapter as well as in Chapter Six. Additional exploratory results beyond the initial statistical hypotheses will be discussed in Chapter Six as well. Inferences from all quantitative and qualitative results may offer suggestions for coaches, athletes, and administrators to better understand the overall lived experience of athletes and create a pathway to alleviate anxiety and increase coping skills.

Statistical Hypothesis 1

TAHo1 Trait Anxiety

TAHo1. No difference exists pre to posttest between treatment group and control group in levels of trait anxiety among NCAA Division I female swimmers.

⁴⁶ The following is the amended problem statement based on the change to a two-group pre/posttest research design.

⁴⁷ While the quantitative data and results collected at the completion of the twelve-week intervention showed a significant positive change in reducing trait anxiety and a positive change approaching significance in the treatment group's ability to cope in an athletic setting, the goal of the intervention was to assist a population through a very difficult time during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The substantial number of subject responses gathered through the treatment group's reflective phenomenological journals seem to indicate that having an outlet to explore their relationship with their sport, their experience, their coaches, their teammates, and their existential condition was something they valued, appreciated, and looked forward to completing at the end of each training week. See Appendix F for a complete recounting of the treatment group's journals.

A significant difference was found with the interaction of Time X Group on trait anxiety scores in female NCAA swimmers after a 12-week intentional coaching intervention Wilk's Lambda $F(1, 48) = 8.39, p < .034, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .09$. Treatment group trait anxiety scores decreased from a pretest score of 35.0 ± 1.7 to posttest score of 30.8 ± 1.6 , while control group trait anxiety scores remained the same from pretest 35.2 ± 1.6 to posttest 34.6 ± 1.5 . Both the control group and treatment group began with essentially the same baseline level of trait anxiety indicating that the two groups approached their sport in a similar way. The significant decrease in levels of trait anxiety of the treatment group indicate that the twelve-week coaching intervention had a positive effect on reducing anxiety in female swimmers. These results are supported by sport psychology literature since this intervention shifted focus from a competitive and outcome driven mentality to one that is focused on the individual and the process of the sporting situation (Burton & Raedeke 2008; Martens, Vealy & Burton, 1990). Furthermore, other sport psychology literature concerning coaching interventions with a focus on mastery and process goals also indicate lower levels of trait anxiety among youth would also support these results (Smith, Smoll, & Cumming, 2007; Smith, Smoll, Schutz & Ptacek, 1995; Williams, 2010). Literature in moral reasoning interventions among athletes and coaches also support interactive protocols which are a similar pedagogical methodology employed in this current study (Brunner, 2009; Lickona, 1991; Gill, 1993; Kohlberg, 1981; Shaw, 2020; Stoll & Beller, 1998; Stoll, Beller & Hahm, 2004; Van Mullen, 2009).

Although the quantitative data shows that a significant change in trait anxiety occurred with the treatment group over time and is supported by the literature in sports psychology as well as educational interventions, this study is essentially pedagogical since the foundation of the twelve week pedagogy is based heavily on existential philosophy, phenomenological methodology, as well as sport philosophy. As discussed in Chapter Two, phenomenology as a method in studying and exploring the sporting experience is not something new (Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2015; Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2010; Breivik, 2013; Cronin & Armour, 2015; Dale, 1996; Hockey & Collinson, 2007; Hughson & Inglis, 2002; James, 2017; Kretchmar, 1994; Purser, 2018; Rutter, 2007; Saint Sing, 2004; Wacquant, 2004; Wharton, 2004). However, the positive results from this educational intervention illustrate that a guided and intentional phenomenological process of reflection,

reading, and writing about the subjective experience in sport can directly assist in the reduction of trait anxiety. Additionally, the historical writers in sport philosophy argued that play should be directed toward a deeper meaning beyond production on the playing field, court, track, or pool (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Davis, 1963; Gerber, 1971; Kretchmar, 1975, 1994; Standal & Moe, 2011; Thomas, 1983). This twelve-week intervention is part of this tradition of sport philosophy and acknowledges by its intentionality the subjective, existential, and personal experience of the athlete has powerful and meaningful value which leads to the positive affect as seen in the quantitative data.

The SAS-2 (Smith, Cumming & Smoll, 2006) is a psychological instrument consisting of 15 items measuring trait anxiety in athletes. This intentional coaching intervention was concerned primarily in developing a coaching methodology designed to help athletes with their unique individual experiences in sport. Due to the limited sample size, the researcher decided to form the hypothesis based on trait anxiety as a whole and not the three subscales measured by the SAS-2 of somatic anxiety, freedom from worry, and concentration interruption (Smith et al., 2006). However, these subscales will be addressed in Chapter Six when more exploratory results are discussed.

Statistical Hypothesis 2

CSHo8 Coping Skills

CSHo8. No difference exists pre to posttest between experimental group and control group in athletic coping skills among Division I female swimmers.

Results were approaching significance with the interaction of Time X Group on coping skills after a 12-week coaching intervention, Wilk's Lambda $F(1, 48) = 3.28, p < .056$, partial $\eta^2 = .074$. Treatment group scores increased from a pretest score of 69.70 ± 2.35 to posttest score of 75.57 ± 2.33 . Control group scores remained the same from pretest 69.70 ± 2.17 to posttest 70.22 ± 2.15 . Both the control group and treatment group began with essentially the same baseline level of athletic coping skills indicating that the two groups approached their sport in a similar way. The increase in the ability of the treatment group to increase coping skills in an athletic setting indicate that the twelve-week coaching intervention had a positive effect on female swimmers. Burton and Raedeke (2008) describe coping strategies as either problem management or emotional management. While specific coping strategies were not taught within this present intervention, the treatment group spent

three months exploring their own personal and emotional connection with their sport. The positive results indicate that thoughtful reflection on one's existential connection to sport appears to help one manage emotion more effectively thereby increasing ability to cope with stress (Burton & Raedeke, 2008, p. 171).

Smith, Smoll, Schultz, and Ptacek (1995), creators of the ACSI-28 believed that if athletes were able to reduce levels of trait anxiety then their ability to cope with stress in athletic and competitive situations should increase as well. The positive increase in overall coping skills in this treatment group seems to confirm and reinforce the findings as Smith et al. (1995).

Schumacher, Becker, and Wiersma (2016) completed a phenomenological study of channel swimmers and found through their content analysis of the swimmers' bracketed interviews, swimmers coped with stress using either internal or external strategies (p. 333). Schumacher et al. described internal coping as focusing on thoughts and sensations in the water while external strategies were focused on outcomes, people, and the environment. The treatment group in this current study were guided through existential reflections on both internal and external stimulus. Through the twelve weeks of journal entries, treatment athletes were asked to reflect on such things as *being in the water, dancing or grinding, relationships with coaches and teammates, and competition*. Reflecting for three months on both internal and external forces in swimming seems to have had a positive effect on athletic coping skills.

The ACSI-28 (Smith, Smoll, Schutz & Ptacek, 1995) is a psychological instrument consisting of 28 items measuring athletic coping skills in athletes. This intentional coaching intervention was concerned primarily in developing a coaching methodology designed to help athletes with their unique individual experiences in sport. Due to the limited sample size, the researcher decided to form the hypothesis based on athletic coping skills as a complete construct and not the seven subscales measured by the ACSI-28 of *coping with adversity, peaking under pressure, goal setting/mental preparation, concentration, freedom from worry, confidence and achievement motivation, and coachability* (Smith et al. 1995). However, four of the seven targeted subscales will be addressed in the following chapter when more exploratory results are discussed.

While significant change was seen in the treatment group on levels of trait anxiety and near significant changes on athletic coping skills, the real power of this intervention occurred weekly with the subjective and thoughtful journal entries of the treatment group athletes. An examination of the philosophical themes of the coaching pedagogy with examples from journal responses will illustrate the effectiveness of this intervention on a more subjective, reflective, and personal level.

Subjective Data: Journal Responses

To understand better the effectiveness of the intentional coaching intervention on the subjective experience of the treatment athletes, a closer examination of the theoretical framework of the pedagogy in relation to the journal responses from the subjects is warranted (for the entirety of the collective journals see Appendix F). The twelve weeks of phenomenological reflection start with what Husserl called the epochè process (Husserl, 1962, p. 99). Moustakas, one of the pedagogical leaders of phenomenological educational research, described this Husserlian process more practically as

...[a] preparation for the deriving new knowledge but also as an experience in itself, a process of setting aside predilections, prejudices, predispositions, and allowing things, events, and people to enter anew into consciousness, and to look and see them again, as if for the first time (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85).

Moustakas employed Husserl's epochè making it more accessible and practical for educators while clarifying that bracketing an experience was not a form of Cartesian doubt but instead perception without supposition. What Moustakas describes as epochè is exactly what was asked of the treatment group. By beginning the first three weeks with reflection prompts concerning the *learning to swim, becoming a swimmer, and the daily dance verses the daily grind* they are asked to take what they once thought they knew and to reduce it down to the essence of the experience and to see it again as if for the first time. Although this is an individual and subjective process, Gill (1993) reminds us that this learning process is not done alone and that the relationship between the coach, the swimmer and the team or community is part of the knowing process.

Understanding the relationship between the knower, knowing and the known (Gill, 1993)

The first week of prompted journals began with a quote from educator Jerry Gill (1993). Jerry Gill, described by the Polanyi Society as a "Teaching Philosopher" (Routledge,

2012, p. 49), has written over 17 books on topics ranging from language acquisition, Native American religions, theology, epistemology, and individual volumes on postmodernist Michael Polyani, Wittgenstein, and Merleau-Ponty.⁴⁸ The phenomenological exploration of the learning process by Gill (1993) is one illustrated by the extended metaphor of dancing which is a Merleau-Pontian way to explain bodily knowing. For Gill, the knower, the knowing, and the known all constitute a symbiotic relationship, each interplaying and leading the other. Gill's goal is to show us that knowledge is not something external to be consumed or acquired, but rather part of a learning process or experience led by a "more experienced learner," the teacher (Gill, 1993). The teacher, or in this current study, the coach, is not separate or external to the "dance" of knowledge espoused by Gill. The coach is also learning from the knower and is part and parcel to the subjective experience of the "knowing." Throughout the twelve weeks, the treatment athletes continued to refer to this theme of dancing as they explored how they know the world through their experience in the water. In the first two weeks of reflection, the athletes have been asked to explore *learning to swim and becoming a swimmer*, two ontological conditions in their relationship with their sport. By week three, the athlete is ready to explore this epistemological idea of dancing or as Merleau-Ponty (1964) would describe as *embodied knowing*. The week three prompt is as follows:

We began this week talking about the idea of practice or training. On Monday your coach attempted to break down all the various things that occur during a practice-- sights, sounds, smells, cadence, tears, laughter, exploration, mindlessness and mindfulness. On Wednesday, we read a short passage from *Spirituality of Sport* (2004) that described the beautiful last practice of two collegiate rowers witnessed by their coach. On Friday, you got into small groups of teammates to discuss things that occur when you train together. When you think about all the many possibilities that happen in the pool every day and compare that to our metaphor of the "dance" the "grind" of training transforms into something beautiful or even spiritual as described by Saint

⁴⁸ For an extensive overview of the breadth of Gill's career see Routledge's, *A teaching philosopher: The work of Jerry Gill*. (2012).

Sing. Describe your daily dance of training and how endurance could be transformed into exploration.

One particular response illustrates this interplay and the depth of reflection less than a month into the process.

For me the dance is always there, the dance is the movement of the water underneath my hands, the routine of putting [on] my cap and goggles and diving into the frigid water, the constant cleaning of my goggles in the water, the pounding of my heart beating in my ear. The dance is always there, the water is our partner, and the water guides you through the dance of practice or the dance of a race. The dance of the water is always there and it's the best feeling, but the grind always comes, and I feel like for me it can overpower the dance of the water and I forget the dance. Being a swimmer, or just being an athlete drains you and drains you fast. I get tired having doubles and weights, I love it but I'm physically and mentally exhausted by the end of the week. And sometimes having the grind is good, it keeps me focused and I can just swim and lift and work out, but that can wear me out sometimes and I remember the dance of the water. And I remember its calming effects, and honestly, I think I have swam my best when there's an equal balance of both the grind and the dance. I've dropped time when I have worked hard and grinded for weeks and weeks but then it comes time to race, and I trust myself and I trust the water. Most of the time I trust the water, but I doubt myself therefore I psyche myself out and mess with my head game. But when I trust myself, the grind, the dance, and the water there is nothing that can hold me back. I just need to learn how to trust myself and not mess with my head before I race (personal communication, 2020).

For this athlete, themes of being-in-the-water, embodied knowing, and self-identity become part of this new experience. Another example from a different treatment athlete further illustrates this theme of the interplay between the athlete, teammates, and the sport. The prompt that stimulated this reflection occurred in week two, *Becoming a Swimmer*. The prompt states:

During this past week we spent a good amount of time talking about what it means to “be” a swimmer. On Monday your coach talked to you about when he decided he would become a coach as he sat and watched the sea lions swim at the National Zoo in Washington DC. We also read from the book *Body and Soul* which described how Lois Wacquant “became” a boxer. On Friday you had some time to listen to your teammates talk about the culture and being a swimmer. All of these stories began with a choice then transitioned into something more intimate and part of the person’s *being*.

Why do you choose to return to the water day after day, week after week?

Described what being a swimmer means to you and how a day in the water can be unique and different.

This treatment athlete’s week 2 response incorporates elements from the previous week while creating a new reflection and experience. Reading her response closely, elements from Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1964) and Gill (1993) can be seen.

I choose to be in the water day after day, and week after week because I do not know a world without. I do not know what it is like to not be in a constant state of sogginess. As you put on clothes for the day after morning practice, those pants don't slide on just right as they stick to your still damp legs. Throughout the day, your hair lies in a nice pile of wet mess [sic] top your head and doesn't fully dry before you are putting that cap back on for PM practice. And when you fall asleep at night, that hair is still in a wet, messy, bun because there is no reason to tackle it as you are just going to back in the water the next morning. The endless cycle of being soggy, is what makes you go back. I continue to swim because of all the people around me. This being my fourth team, means I have met many people and been part of many families. Swimming has given me the opportunity to grow so much as a person because of the number of people who have been around me during my time at the pool. Although, there are moments and people I would like to forget, these negative experiences are what makes me the person I am today. Not many people can say they left home at the age of 17 to live with a different family. And even fewer people can say within those next 2 years,

they have created family bonds with 4 different ones (including my actual one). I can say I have a "fake" family and know that those people love me like their real child all because I am a swimmer (personal communication, 2020).

This study embraces the idea that the researcher is also the coach within the intervention. Gill (1993) supports that interplay and dance between a more experienced knower (coach) and the athlete. This example of the appreciation of that relationship further illustrates that trust and dance. In the second month of the study, the treatment athletes were asked to explore relationships with coach, teammates, and finally competition. The prompt for the eighth week concerned specifically the important relationship athletes have with coaches. The prompt asked:

This week we began with your coach discussing his growth as a coach over the past five years and how his understanding of athletes has changed upon years of study and reflection. On Wednesday we read from Kareem Abdul-Jabbar's memoir of his fifty-year relationship with his coach. On Friday, each of you had an opportunity to "coach" one of your peers for a short time. For the past two months we have discussed how learning can be a kind of dance between the Knower, the Knowing, and the Known (Gill, 1993). Your coaches throughout your life have been an important partner in this dance. One day you may become a head of a family, an organization, a classroom, or perhaps even a team of your own. Think about how you would like to be perceived as a leader and coach. Describe the environment you would want to create, how you would lead, and some of the important values you would instill in your "team."

In this athlete's response, we see the importance placed on belief, kindness, and understanding that needs to be possessed by coaches. Garrison (1997) would support this vulnerability and ethic of caring. The athlete responded:

As I got older and was looking to swim in at the college level, I had coaches that were more intense but also are a huge part of my life. When I moved to *Former Swim Club*, *former coach* started coaching me and he is someone that I will be in contact with for the rest of my life probably. He never gave up on me even when I gave up on myself and I think that is the true definition of a

good and dedicated coach... [A]nd coming here you have been a coach that has helped mold me to the woman I am today, you have never given up on me either and keep pushing me to be the best I can be. You have helped me tremendously through these two seasons and have made me look at myself in a different way. I realized that what I was doing to myself mentally was not good and was hindering me from my full potential. It is a work in progress, but I know I have you by my side to help me when I am stuck in this process. If I ever have the chance to coach someone, I want to be like you and *former coach*, someone who never gives up on someone no matter how defeated they look. I also want to be someone for people to look up to and want to be a role model figure (personal communication, 2020).

Understanding who the athlete is from a subjective experience (Gill, 1993)

Gill's approach to education is one deeply ensconced in "who" the student is as a person (1993). Gill's work is heavily influenced by Merleau-Ponty's (1962, 1964) discussion of the body/subject. For Merleau-Ponty, the body is not something that exists in space separate from the conscious self.

[M]y whole body for me is not an assemblage of organs juxtaposed in space. I am in undivided possession of it and I know where each of my limbs is through a *body image* in which all are included (1962, p. 98).

Within the twenty-hour confines of the NCAA training week, time to explore one's subjective experience is abandoned to the stress and anxiety of training the body toward the desired outcome. Yet the body, cannot be separated from the self. Gaining an appreciation of the uniqueness of the athlete authenticates and empowers her experience and existential sense of self. The second week of the intervention had a reflection theme of "becoming a swimmer." This weekly prompt was not about how well they performed as an athlete but when the moment occurred when her sport become part of her identity. A poignant example of this "becoming" is as follows:

...[I] never expected to go back and run through my life as a swimmer. In all honesty, my swim career and the way I perceived being a swimmer was completely ruined by my past coach. It was truly hard for me to try and remember exactly when I went from someone who swims, to an actual

swimmer. The reason it was so difficult was that I completely repressed all my memories from ages 12-15. I was verbally, mentally and physically abused by my past coach. He would constantly call me fat or a hippo because, in his eyes, I was 'overweight'. At 14, I weighed 140 pounds of pure muscle. I was weightlifting every other day, and I became a 5'4 muscle ball. He would call me out for being slow, for holding up the group, for just being myself. I described myself as a soulless shell, no emotion, no desire. I didn't have a goal at that time. I was not swimming for myself, I was not swimming for my family, I was not swimming for my team nor for my coach. I was swimming because I felt forced. Because that was the only way of life I knew. At 14 I was diagnosed with depression. I went to therapy, but I could never open up because I always felt like my coach was listening to me somehow. If I said one bad thing about him, I would end up dead. I was practically a robot. I had the same routine, week by week. I became so depressed I lost all my school friends. I was the youngest in my group by 2 years, and no one wanted to be friends with the girl who could not do anything right. For 4 years straight, I cried myself to sleep every night. I got night terrors of going to practice the next day. I would wake up in a pool of sweat and tears every morning. I would pull myself together and get going on my day. The point of this whole backstory is that I never truly felt like a swimmer. I was always swimming for some sort of status. If I met a certain qualifying standard, or if I medaled at a national meet, maybe my coach would cut me some slack for a week. Now don't get me wrong, all that is super cool, but I never felt satisfied with how I swam, because my coach was NEVER satisfied with me. The only reason I returned to the water each day was that I was forced to. Forced by myself and forced by my coach. When I switched clubs, I still never found that sense of being a swimmer. I definitely was a whole lot happier when I switched, but I still swam because I felt forced by myself. But this all changed last year. My first phone call with Mark changed my life. I'm not exaggerating either. The minute I got off the phone with Mark I felt valued. It was such an odd feeling. No one has ever truly valued me as a swimmer. It was also a sense of relief.

All my hard work and dedication actually paid off. I remembered calling my mom right after I got off the phone with Mark and telling her that this is the school I want to go to, not just because it has a solid swim team, but because they want me on the team. I have never been wanted on any team. I became a swimmer after I got off the phone with Mark. Everything prior to that, I was just someone who paddles around in the water. Ever since that call, my perspective on the sport and how I viewed myself changed. I instantly felt happier, the happiest I had been in a LONG time. Because of this experience, I can proudly call myself a swimmer (personal communication, 2020).

This journal entry is deeply personal and allowed the athlete to not only explore her identity as an athlete but also her relationships with her sport and her previous coaches. Her mention of value, care, and feeling wanted is intimately tied to her sense of self in the water and wholly Merleau-Ponty's description of the body/subject experience (1962, 1964).

Exploring the need to trust one's passion, intuition and embrace vulnerability as part of the educational process (Garrison, 1997)

The creation of a coaching intervention based on the phenomenological subjective experience of individual athletes is more than the design of a lesson or season plan. The epistemological foundation lies not only in Gill's "dance" but in the intuition, passion, and vulnerability of the coach/educator (Garrison, 1997). Jim Garrison believes that the basis of the educational relationship needs to be one of love or *Eros*.

Like Jerry Gill, Garrison posits that true teaching is shared feeling. For Garrison, however, this shared feeling occurs at a precognitive level. Simply, great teachers and coaches feel or intuit the mood and needs of their athletes. If they remain available and open to this precognitive qualitative background, they will be more prepared to meet the immediate needs of their charges (p. 118). Yet outcome-driven, realistic sport often clouds this intuition with the need for motor development and game management. The epistemological design of this intervention allows for coaches to read the feelings of their athletes through the process of the guided journals. Additionally, the athletes experienced the feelings of the coach through the written responses to their posts-thus, the dance continued. Garrison would see the value of these journals as the athletes' ability or attempt to "edit the texts of their lives" (p. 145). Several of these journal entries illustrate that the

treatment athletes appreciated and enjoyed the vulnerability and emotional exchange. By week ten, the treatment athletes were finally asked about their relationship with competition.

The prompt stated:

On Monday, your coach began the week discussing competition in all its forms utilizing John Wooden's definition of success as the basis for this reflection. On Wednesday, we discussed each block that comprised Wooden's Pyramid of Success (Wooden & Jamison, 2005). On Friday, we asked you to write your fears about competition onto a paper without your name and we discussed them as a group.

When you joined your first swim team as a young athlete, competition was fun. Describe your earliest memories of the fun and joy of competition as a swimmer. Reflect on times in this pool when "competition" brought you joy.

What are the similarities between the two "lived experiences?"

The following response from a treatment athlete again illustrates the connectiveness of the phenomenological reduction of her experience. While asked specifically about competition, she reflects to the previous two weeks concerning relationships with team and coach. Hauerwas (1981) would describe the importance of a community of character as an integral component to the experiential and ontological sporting moment. This athlete connects the love or *eros* from her coaches (Garrison, 1997), her community or team (Hauerwas, 1981), and foreshadows the next week's reflection topic of joy and happiness. While it is interesting that this athlete did not know that *joy and happiness* would be discussed in the next week, the phenomenological journey allowed her to arrive early. The athlete responded:

This weekend has made me excited to swim again and meant the world to me, not only did both Mark and Katie help a ton with starting to get over my performance anxiety but the team is so supportive, and I loved being weird and getting them to laugh, it made me laugh. I was ready to give up competition and to either just swim for myself or to give it up all together at the start of quarantine. However, I gave Mark and this team a chance, and I am glad I did. I am incredibly grateful to be a part of the team and swim, everyone including the coaches has aided in my journey to loving swimming

again and I do not know where I would be if I wasn't here with them being a part of something bigger than me (personal communication, 2020).

Another example from a different athlete explains her need for a healthy relationship with her coach.

So, from my coaches I have learned a lot about myself and what I need as a swimmer. I need to be coached as (*name of athlete*), because I am different than other swimmers, and vice versa, everyone is their own swimmer, and everyone needs to be coached to help themselves. I need a coach who is supportive and can help me through my rough patches. I need a coach who is going to help me grow as a swimmer and just as a person, swimming is more than just the pool, a swimmer, and a coach, it's also about the relationships and connections you make along the way (personal communication, 2020).

Illustrating the power of storytelling and role-modelling (Lickona, 1991)

Lickona's pedagogy concerning the importance of role-modeling and storytelling are integral components to the design of the intentional coaching intervention (Lickona, 1991, p. 80). Like Gill and Garrison, Lickona also posits the paramount importance of teacher as caregiver in the cognitive development of their students. Yet Lickona differs from Gill especially because he is a moral educator and not a phenomenologist. Still this coaching intervention can embrace Lickona's emphasis on storytelling as an extremely important technique in the moral development of students and utilize it as another way to enable athletes to begin to bracket their subjective experience through the words of others.

Stories, read or told, have always been among the favorite teaching instruments of the world's great moral educators. Stories teach by attraction rather than compulsion; they invite rather than impose. They capture the imagination and touch the heart. All of us have experienced the power of a good story to stir strong feelings. That's why storytelling is such a natural way to engage and develop the emotional side of a child's character (Lickona, 1991, pp. 79-81).

Throughout the twelve-week intentional coaching intervention, storytelling by the coach/researcher is an integral component to the weekly module. If the weekly module begins with a topic of subjective experience, the Wednesday of the week calls for story-time.

The telling of a story, through recitation of the written word, not only captures the imagination, as described by Lickona (1991), but also creates an intimate connection between coach/researcher and his team. Several times throughout the weeks, the treatment athletes would make references to the stories told the previous Wednesday. An example of the power of storytelling occurred early in the study in week three when discussing Gill's metaphor of dancing. Only three weeks into this study, one can see in this athlete's short passage the elements of phenomenological reduction, intentionality, and embodied knowing (Husserl, 1962; Moustakas, 1994; Merleau-Ponty, 1964).

The reading this week has made me look at myself in a different way. After college, I will not be competing competitively anymore and that is going to be an emotional change for me. It is something that has been with me and part of my routine for 12 years. After hearing the ending of the book I told myself that I want to look at every practice, every meet, and just every time I jump into the water as a "dance". Yes, some days will be harder than others because I may be sore, maybe stressed from school, or may just be exhausted mentally but that should turn the sport into a "grind". When I get into the water I am just going to swim and that is it. I'm going to try not to get upset about the clock or how I feel, because tomorrow may be different. I think most of my life I have looked to the sport as a grind and I think that needs to end now, I have a lot of love for the sport and that itself should turn it into a "dance"(personal communication, 2020).

Giving voice to the voiceless, increasing autonomy, relatedness, and connection⁴⁹

Perhaps the most important aspect in the creation of this twelve-week coaching intervention is the movement away from coaches treating their athletes as a “mean-to-an-end” in the quest for more wins to a methodology that gives a voice to a population that has been rendered voiceless. The process of phenomenological reduction guided over the twelve weeks of the intervention created a pathway for the athletes to bracket their existential condition in their sport and reduce it to its truth or essence. Husserl (1962) was first to

⁴⁹ For a more in-depth look at the positive response to the journaling process, see Appendix F, Week Twelve. While the weekly prompt explicitly asked about the athlete's subject truth and essence with her sport, many treatment athletes mentioned how much they enjoyed the twelve weeks of reflection. Some even thanked the coach/researcher for allowing them to participate in the study.

describe this process while Heidegger's (1953, 1996) search for authentic existence through Dasein's *being-in-the-world* saw this reduction closely linked to temporality as well as spaciality. However, Moustakas (1994) applied more useful and practical language for educational researchers in his description of the process of phenomenological reduction.

...[P]henomenological reduction is the process of horizontalization. Horizons are unlimited. We can never exhaust completely our experience of things no matter how many times we reconsider them or view them. A new horizon arises each time one recedes. It is a never-ending process and, though we may reach a stopping point and discontinue our perception of something, the possibility of discovery is unlimited. The horizontal makes of conscious experience a continuing mystery, one that opens regions of laughter and of hope or pain and anguish these enter our conscious life (Moustakas, 1994, p. 95).

Reading the prompted journal responses from the treatment athletes, the laughter, pain, and anguish referred to by Moustakas is evident. More importantly, this reduction practiced intentionally by these athletes is potentially an ongoing discovery process that can continue. The final week of reflection allowed the treatment group to search for a "meaning and essence" in their experience but to also explore the three months of journaling. The athletes were prompted as follows:

We have spent the past three months reflecting on your personal journey through the sport of swimming. Through our weekly discussions we discovered that your journey and dance have many partners. You have a relationship with the water, a coach, teammates, competitors, and the sport itself. As we head into the midway point of your season this week, we spent a little time every day to acknowledge that your "lived experience" in swimming has truth, meaning, and essence. Describe the meaning of YOUR experience in the water both the beautiful and sublime.

The first-person phenomenological responses by these athletes began with reducing their subjective experience to when they learned to swim and began to identify their sense of self with the sport in which they participated. The next step in their epochè was to explore elements of their sport through the metaphors of dancing or grinding, play, and the concepts

of control and flow. Using Hauerwas's (1981) concept of a community of character, the athletes were then prompted to explore relationships with coaches, teammates, and competition. Again, Hauerwas was a moral educator and not a phenomenologist. But to move from the potential isolation of subjective reflection, a link needed to be created to community and team. Finally, in the final two weeks, the treatment athletes explored their new horizon and wrote about finding *joy and happiness* then *truth and essence*. This is not the first intervention that used journaling as a method for reflection. However, through an approach to coaching with intentionality directed toward the authentic lived experience of athletes, the treatment athletes in this study were taught to phenomenologically reduce their personal experience and find truth and meaning and their sport. The following response illustrates not only the exploration of meaning but the appreciative aspect of enjoying this process and journey.

I have really enjoyed this journey. It was so nice to be able to talk about myself if that makes sense. I don't mean for that to sound selfish, but it was just a breath of fresh air to be able to think about, and for, myself for at least a few minutes once a week. I think I sometimes lose sight of who I am because I try so hard to please everyone else, but I think writing these journals has helped me discover a lot more about myself... [T]hank you for guiding me to be the best version of (*athlete's name*) that there is and I can't wait to spend two (ish) more years swimming for the best coach in the world...[a]nd next to the best teammates/friends a girl could have (personal communication, 2020).

Another athlete recognized that the journals allowed her a direct line of communication to her coach. In this passage one can gather how important it was to have her voice heard by someone who cared.

Throughout the past 12 weeks we have reflected on our different experiences throughout this sport. These journals have been an excellent way to put personal thoughts and feelings into words, as well as have a direct line to you as our coach. I think that these journals have really allowed for you to better understand and know the journey I have taken to be where I am today...[T]hese journals have helped me turn some negative experiences into positive lessons and I understand that each and every thing

that takes place in my life helps me be who I am. I have always had such a strong relationship with water. I have always been in the water and swimming and cannot remember a time where I didn't know how to swim. This sport is so much more than just a sport. It is more than just a way to stay fit and exercise. It has given me a family. Along my journey from team to team I have made friends that will be in my life forever...[I] can turn to any of these families still and I know I have their support always. I have so many memories that will last a lifetime even the hard ones. I think it is so important to understand that I am who I am because of the hard times and because of this sport (personal communication, 2020).

Finally, one athlete recognized that the weekly journals allowed her to develop ways to cope with difficult situations in her life.

This whole journaling process has really helped me understand my relationship with the sport as well as how I cope with different areas of life. Even though I have been writing about swimming and my history with swimming, that doesn't mean that it doesn't relate to different parts of my life. Swimming has made me into the person I am today and has helped develop different traits and routines within my life. To me, each part of life has a meaning and I think everything happens for a reason. Each decision I make helps develop me as a person, even the smallest decisions like choosing to do a set on my own than swimming with the group. Even though this is a small decision, it helps shape who I am which is someone who wants to better themselves physically and mentally. Swimming a set by yourself isn't normally ideal and is not always fun, it would have been easy for me to say no and just do the normal set with all my teammates, but I know that if I didn't do the distance set, I would be upset with myself the rest of the day. Swimming has pushed me to my limits and has helped me develop a strong work ethic as well as good time management. Sport in general, in my opinion, is a way for individuals to manage all the different elements of life. School can be compared to your job and sport could be compared to hanging out with

your friends or an extra activity outside a work environment that makes you happy (personal communication, 2020).

An important aspect of these three responses is that they all wrote about finding value in the phenomenological reduction experienced in the journal entries. They all concluded that taking some time each week to think about themselves, their experiences, and their relationships allowed for happiness and potential fulfillment.

Summary of Results

Exploring the quantitative data as it relates to the literature illustrates that the twelve-week intentional coaching intervention appeared to have a significant positive effect on both levels of trait anxiety and coping skills in female collegiate swimmers. However, examining the thematic constructs of the coaching methodology with the subjective journal entries from the treatment athletes further sheds light on the effectiveness and power of the intervention. In their own words, the treatment athletes acknowledged the usefulness of the journaling process, reaffirmed their personal relationship with the water, their sport, each other, and their coach. Most importantly, the treatment athletes were given a chance to find their voice once again where they had once been rendered silent by the sport they loved. This twelve-week coaching intervention was created in particular to address an existential crisis in the sport of swimming and sport as a whole. While trait anxiety and coping skills are quantifiable psychological constructs and important mental health variables to be tested, the COVID-19 pandemic created a moral duty for coaches to find another pathway to help athletes deal with the unknown stress and fear. The phenomenological shared journey of the coaching intervention was the key (see Appendix F). The quantitative data collected is promising, the strength, depth, and power of the first-person accounts in the treatment journals supports a notion that this intervention helped several athletes through a very difficult time in their lives.

Chapter Six: Summary, Exploratory Results, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of Chapter Six is to summarize findings and limitations, further examine exploratory results beyond the initial hypotheses, and give recommendations for future research and expansion of this study.

Problem Statement

The purpose of this quasi-experimental study using a pretest/posttest two group design, is to examine the effect of a twelve-week systematic intentional coaching education with an epistemological existential methodology on the mental health and well-being of athletes as measured by levels of trait anxiety (SAS-2) and athletic coping skills (ACSI-28).

Summary

By 2014, the NCAA began to address the mental health and overall wellness of its athletes (NCAA, 2014). Just three years later, in a study conducted by Cox et al. (2017), depression and anxiety among collegiate athletes was shown to be an alarming problem and one that appeared to be growing (Cox, Ross-Stewart, & Foltz, 2017). In the same year, journalist Kate Fagan published her detailed account of the self-inflicted death of University of Pennsylvania track athlete Maddy Halloran (Fagan, 2017). Between March and May of 2022, Stanford soccer player Katie Meyer (Bonagura, 2022), Southern University cheerleader Arlana Miller (Gordon, 2022), University of Wisconsin runner Sarah Shulze (Lynch, 2022), James Madison University softball catcher Lauren Bernett (Bieler & Bonesteel, 2022), and St. Louis University swimmer Sean North (Keith, 2022), all took their own life. Presently, with the added stressor of Name, Image, Likeness money saturating NCAA athletics (Hosick, 2021), the commodification and objectification of collegiate athletes will continue unabated while the mental health and well-being of the athletes in our charge will continue to suffer. By now, all Division I athletic departments have made efforts to address the mental health of their athletes, some even hiring fulltime staff within athletic training rooms dedicated to counseling and other psychological services. Yet the rash of suicides by athletes in nonrevenue sports in the spring of 2022 illustrates that the problem with elite level collegiate athletics is one that goes deeper than mental health. Mental health is a crisis of existential proportion—one that is deeply rooted in the phenomenological experience of young athletes often ignored by coaches looking to win.

The creation of this twelve-week systematic intentional coaching intervention was an attempt at examining this mental health crisis on a deeper ontological level. Utilizing two valid and reliable instruments measuring trait anxiety (SAS-2) and athletic coping skills (ACSI-28), quantitative data illustrated a statistically significant positive change in the treatment group over time in level of trait anxiety and approaching a significant positive change over time in coping skills. While both the treatment group and control group began the twelve weeks at essentially the same level of trait anxiety and coping skills, only the group receiving the weekly intervention saw any positive change. Although the sample size was small $N=23$, one can conclude that if athletes are allowed to explore their subjective and unique lived experience in their sport; if their first-person description of their phenomenological reduction is valued and responded to by their coach; if precious hours of motor training are exchanged for existential epochè; and if communities of character are allowed to form where all voices are authenticated; athletes will have a much more complete, healthy, and fulfilling experience of *being-in-their-sport*.

Although the quantitative data gathered supports the hypothesis that a twelve-week systematic intentional coaching intervention will positively effect trait anxiety and coping skills with female collegiate swimmers, the 188 pages of phenomenological journal entries gathered tell a more compelling and powerful story that cannot be easily measured (See Appendix F). In a first-person voice, the swimmers in this study bracketed their own personal experiences and found the essence, meaning, and community in their swimming. Yet the sheer volume of the responses and the hours spent by the researcher/coach writing back to each individual athlete (averaging between 3-5 hours every Sunday for twelve weeks) illustrates that potential limitations and obstacles exist for replicating this study for other coaches.

Delimitations

This intentional coaching intervention was delimited in several important ways that may have affected the outcome and results. The three potential delimitations that need to be addressed are gender, sport, and COVID-19.

First, this study was delimited to female collegiate swimmers. Further studies should address whether male identified athletes would have similar results after a twelve-week existential intervention. However, preliminary results in other studies argue that men would

also benefit. Foster's 2022 study concerning the aesthetic connection to the lived experience in sport illustrates that males do reflect at a similar if not deeper level than those female respondents (2022). Haselhun's work with male collegiate baseball players also indicates that men would be open to interventions of this kind (2013). Finally, Culp's (2012) study of moral reasoning of US Marines at the United States Marine Basic School at Quantico seems to argue that if this coaching intervention were used with male athletes similar positive results would occur.

Second, this current study was delimited to the endurance sport of swimming. Swimming is often referred to as an individual sport where athletes swim for hours at a time in seemingly isolated training. Future research should examine whether team sports like football or soccer would show similar results. However, in over thirty years of moral reasoning research, Stoll, colleagues, and researchers from the Center for ETHICS* at the University of Idaho have shown that moral reasoning interventions have similar effects independent of the sport played (Brunner, 2009; Haselhuhn, 2013; Stoll, Beller & Hahn, 2004; Van Mullen, 2009).

Finally, this study was conducted over the fall semester of 2020 during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. During early weeks in the study, the season and competitions were still in question. One cannot account for whether the unknown aspect of the swimming season escalated levels of anxiety on the pretest for both the treatment and control groups. However, the subjective data gathered through the reflective journals seem to indicate that a positive change occurred independent of COVID-19. Throughout the twelve weeks of the intervention, COVID restrictions, isolations, positive cases, distancing, and masking remained a feature of daily life. Participants in this study may have had elevated levels of anxiety at the beginning of the season but by December, rather than diminishing, COVID cases were increasing at alarming rates during the holiday season which predated vaccines for the general population. Thus, one can conclude that any reduction in anxiety under these conditions were a positive from the intervention. Therefore, to gain knowledge of the effectiveness of this intervention independent of COVID-19, future studies need to be conducted outside of global pandemics or questions concerning COVID need to be addressed both at the pre and posttest. Additionally, COVID-19 restrictions on travel and access forced the cancelation of the systematic coaching observation of the three coaches involved in the

study (see Appendix E). Being able to observe the amount of time each coach devoted to certain aspects of training would have given our results more depth because the uniqueness of this approach to coaching could be contrasted with conventional NCAA Division I coaching styles.

Limitations

This twelve-week intentional coaching intervention was also limited in three important ways that may have affected the results. The three biggest limitations were sample size, education, and training of coach/researcher, and the psychological instruments used to measure trait anxiety (SAS-2) and athletic coping skills (ACSI-28).

The original design of this intervention was intended to include four total groups: two treatment groups and two control groups. Due to COVID-19 travel restrictions and limited access to the control groups, the researcher was only able to present the study to the control groups via zoom and collect data via Qualtrics--never in person. This limited access severely influenced the number of responses or the completion of the posttest from the control groups. Therefore, the expected sample size was reduced from an expected number of over 50 to one of N=27 total control participants. The two treatment groups lost three respondents due to attrition and two participants failed to answer the ACSI-28 posttest for a new total of N=23. If this study was to remain a four-group design, the groups would average 12 respondents and data analysis would more than likely reveal less. At this point, the research team decided to analyze the data as a two-group design given the fact that both control groups received no intervention and both treatment groups received the exact same intervention. Therefore, the control group became N=27 and the treatment group N=23. While the results indicate that a twelve-week intentional coaching intervention made a significant positive effect on reducing levels of trait anxiety and increasing coping skills in female collegiate swimmers, further studies are needed with larger sample sizes to support these initial positive findings.

Perhaps one of the biggest limitations in potentially replicating this study is the education and experience of the coach/researcher. The coach/researcher was educated in existential philosophy, holds an advanced degree from an Ivy League institution, and four years of doctoral work in moral education and character development at the commencement of the intervention. The coach/researcher also possessed over twenty years of Division I NCAA coaching experience. Simply, most coaches do not possess this educational or

professional background. This limitation will be addressed further in the implications section of this chapter.

Finally, this study's findings were limited by the results collected from the SAS-2 and ACSI-28. While the initial hypotheses concerned anxiety and coping skills as singular variables, both instruments consisted of subscales exploring deeper psychological concepts. The SAS-2 consisted of three subscales testing somatic anxiety, freedom from worry, and concentration disruption (Smith, Cumming & Smoll, 2006). Somatic anxiety is incredibly individualized and not relevant to the current study. The ACSI-28 is composed of seven different subscales in only its 28 items. The subscales consisted of coachability, confidence and motivation, freedom from worry, concentration, goal setting and mental preparation, peaking under pressure, and coping with adversity (Smith, Smoll, Schutz & Ptacek, 1995). While several of these subscales are relevant to this study, this instrument also consists of several subscales not needing to be tested. If further studies are to be conducted, a different instrument testing coping skills may be needed. These subscales will be addressed in the exploratory results.

Exploratory Results

The original research design of this study consisted of four groups: two treatment groups and two control groups. The reason for the two treatment groups were that several of the athletes involved had been exposed to the coaching style of the researcher/coach (returners) and it was thought that exploring the difference between those who had experience with the pedagogy, and those who did not (newcomers), might add some further insight into the effectiveness of the intervention. However, as explained in the two previous chapters, due to small sample size of all four groups and difficult access during the COVID-19 pandemic, the research team decided to run the results as a two-group pretest/posttest model.⁵⁰

Newcomers verses Returners

After the conclusion of running the data as a two-group design, the principal investigator decided to explore the difference between the two treatment groups despite the small sample size N=12, N=11. The Treatment Group One (T1) was comprised of

⁵⁰ For a more detailed explanation of the change in experimental design please see Chapter Four: Data Collected and Cleaned.

newcomers to the program that had no experience with the coaching style of the researcher/coach. Treatment Group Two (T2) was comprised of athletes who have returned to the program and had previous experience with the coaching style of the researcher/coach. The following is the exploratory results with the interaction of time on the two treatment groups on trait anxiety and athletic coping skills.

Exploratory Statistical Sub-Problems Newcomers verses Returners

Sub-Problems

Trait Anxiety

TA3. What difference exists pretest to posttest between treatment group one (newcomers) and treatment group two (returners) in levels of trait anxiety among Division I NCAA female swimmer?

Statistical Hypothesis

Trait Anxiety

TAHo3. No difference was found pretest to posttest between treatment group one (newcomers) and treatment group two (returners) in levels of trait anxiety among Division I NCAA female swimmers.

A significant difference was found between the interaction on Time X Group on trait anxiety after a twelve-week coaching intervention Wilk's Lambda $F(1,21) = 5.65, p < .027$, partial $\eta^2 = .21$. A significant decrease in anxiety scores occurred in the treatment group 1 (newcomers) pretest score of 38.0 ± 2.3 to posttest score of 31.2 ± 2.1 . Whereas no significant change was found in treatment group 2 (returners) pretest score of 31.7 ± 2.4 to a posttest score of 30.4 ± 2.2 (See Table 6).

Table 6

Difference Over Time Between Groups on Trait Anxiety

	Pretest Mean	SD	Posttest Mean	SD
Newcomers	38.0 _a	2.3	31.2 _b	2.1
Returners	31.7 _a	2.4	30.4 _a	2.2

Note1. Means with different subscripts differ significantly at $p < .05$ level.

Sub-Problems

Coping Skills

CS4. What difference exists pretest to posttest between treatment group one (newcomers) and treatment group two (returners) in athletic coping skills among Division I NCAA female swimmers?

Statistical Hypothesis

Coping Skills

CSHo4. No difference was found pretest to posttest between treatment group one (newcomers) and treatment group two (returners) in athletic coping skills among Division I NCAA female swimmers.

A significant difference was found between the interaction on Time X Group on coping skills after a twelve-week coaching intervention Wilk's Lambda $F(1,21) = 4.19$, $p < .053$, partial $\eta^2 = .17$. An increase occurred from the treatment group (newcomers) pretest score of 69.3 ± 2.6 to posttest score of 77.1 ± 2.7 . Whereas no significant change was found in treatment group 2 (returners) pretest score of 71.8 ± 2.7 to a posttest score of 73.9 ± 2.9 (See Table 7).

Table 7

Difference Over Time Between Groups on Coping Skills

	Pretest Mean	SD	Posttest Mean	SD
Newcomers	69.3 _a	2.6	77.1 _b	2.7
Returners	71.8 _a	2.7	73.9 _a	2.9

Note 1. Means with different subscripts differ significantly at $p < .05$ level.

Summary of Results of Newcomers Verses Returners

While splitting the treatment group into two smaller subgroups of returning athletes and newcomers significantly reduced the sample size ($N=12$, $N=11$), both groups saw a reduction in trait anxiety and an increase in athletic coping skills. However, the newcomers to the program witnessed a positive significant change in both variables on a much larger

scale than that of the returners to the program. Possible explanations for these results are as follows.

The newcomers to the program began the intervention with a pretest trait anxiety score more significantly elevated than that of the returners to the team $M=38.0$ versus $M=31.7$ (a possible mid-range score is 30). This heightened level of anxiety could be due in large part to having completed their senior year of high school during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the stressors of freshman year of college, learning a new team, and continued COVID restrictions more than likely added to the elevated anxiety. Conversely, one could see the much lower pretest score of the returners as an indication that exposure to the coaching style of the researcher/coach created a safe environment on which to enter a year with unknown outcomes. However, by the end of the twelve-week intervention, both groups of athletes saw reduction in levels of trait anxiety and finished with similar scores $M=31.2$ and $M=30.4$. A possible conclusion drawn from this limited quantitative data is that although both treatment groups started the intervention at different levels of anxiety, at the end of twelve weeks they finished at similar levels. These results indicate that exposure to a twelve-week systematic coaching intervention appears to reduce a team's level of anxiety to a point where all members are functioning at a similar place. Additionally, these limited results also indicate that freshmen entering any program will have heightened levels of anxiety and are a more at-risk group needing intervention.

A similar affect was witnessed when examining the change in athletic coping skills over time between the newcomers and returners to the treatment group. The returners to the program began the intervention with slightly better coping scores than the newcomers, $M=71.8$ versus $M=69.3$ (112 being the highest possible score and 28 the lowest). The larger pretest score for the returners could be due to entering an environment where they felt safe and respected. Conversely, the lower score of the newcomer groups could be due to the elevated levels of anxiety as evident by pretest scores of the SAS-2. However, by the conclusion of the twelve-week intervention, both groups saw positive changes in levels of athletic coping skills with the newcomers significantly raising their scores to $M=77.1$ and the returners to $M=73.9$. While the sample sizes were extremely small, a twelve-week existential coaching intervention appears to have a positive effect on athletic coping skills in female swimmers independent of how long they have participated within a program.

Throughout the twelve weeks of the coaching intervention the environment and climate surrounding COVID-19 and its associated safety measures and protocols intensified. Athletes in this study had travel restricted to designated geographical areas; conducted strength-training and all out of the water activities in masks; treatment athletes were split into two different locker rooms for social distancing; treatment athletes were separated to opposite sides of pool for social distancing; although competitions did occur, each meet brought with it fear of outbreaks and fear of whether meets would continue; and finally face to face meetings or normal team functions were prohibited.

Statistical Sub-Problems for Targeted Sub-scales on SAS-2 and ACSI-28

This intentional coaching intervention's findings were limited by the results collected from the SAS-2 and ACSI-28. While the initial hypotheses concerned anxiety and coping skills as singular variables, both instruments consisted of subscales exploring deeper psychological concepts. After consultation with a distinguished sports psychologist, the principal investigator determined to target specific variables for further exploratory analysis.⁵¹ The SAS-2 consisted of three subscales testing somatic anxiety, freedom from worry, and concentration disruption (Smith, Cumming & Smoll, 2006). Somatic anxiety is incredibly individualized and not relevant to the current study so was therefore not targeted. The ACSI-28 is composed of seven different subscales in only its 28 items. The subscales consisted of coachability, confidence and motivation, freedom from worry, concentration, goal setting and mental preparation, peaking under pressure, and coping with adversity (Smith, Smoll, Schutz & Ptacek, 1995). While several of these subscales are relevant to this study, this instrument also consists of several subscales not needing to be tested due to not being part of the coaching pedagogy. Therefore, only four of the seven sub-scales were targeted. A repeated measures ANOVA was run comparing the two groups over time (N=23, N=27) using SPSS version 26. The results for these exploratory results for the psychological sub-scales of the SAS-2 and ACSI-28 are as follows.

⁵¹ Personal communication with Damon Burton, PhD (June, 2022).

Sub-Problems SAS-2

Trait Anxiety Sub-Scales

TA5. What difference exists pre to posttest between treatment group and control group in levels of trait anxiety as measured by freedom from worry among Division I NCAA female swimmers?

Statistical Hypothesis: Freedom from Worry

TAHo5. No difference exists pre to posttest between treatment group and control group in levels of trait anxiety as measured by freedom from worry among Division I NCAA female swimmers.

A significant difference was found between the interaction on Time X Group on the freedom from worry trait anxiety sub-scale after a twelve-week coaching intervention Wilk's Lambda $F(1,48) = 4.73, p < .04, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .05$. A significant change occurred from the treatment group pretest score of $14.2 \pm .79$ to posttest score of $11.9 \pm .72$. No change occurred in the control group pretest score of $14.9 \pm .73$ to a posttest score of $14.3 \pm .67$. (See Table 8).

Table 8

Difference Over Time Between Groups on Freedom from Worry SAS-2

	Pretest Mean	SD	Posttest Mean	SD
Treatment Group	14.2 _a	.79	11.9 _b	.72
Control Group	14.9 _a	.73	14.3 _a	.67

Note 1. Means with different subscripts differ significantly at $p < .05$.

TA6. What difference exists pre to posttest between treatment group and control group in levels of trait anxiety as measured by concentration disruption among Division I NCAA female swimmers?

Statistical Hypothesis: Concentration Disruption

TAHo6. No difference exists pre to posttest between treatment group and control group in levels of trait anxiety as measured by concentration disruption among Division I NCAA female swimmers.

No significant difference was found between the interaction on Time X Group on the concentration disruption trait anxiety sub-scale after a twelve-week coaching intervention

Wilk's Lambda $F(1,48) = .001, p < .97$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$. No significant change occurred from the treatment group pretest score of $10.30 \pm .53$ to posttest score of $10.96 \pm .50$. No change occurred in the control group pretest score of $9.59 \pm .49$ to a posttest score of $10.22 \pm .46$ (See Table 9).

Table 9

Difference Over Time Between Groups on Concentration Disruption SAS-2

	Pretest Mean	SD	Posttest Mean	SD
Treatment Group	10.30 _a	.53	10.96 _a	.50
Control Group	9.59 _a	.49	10.22 _a	.46

Note 1. Means with different subscripts differ significantly at $p < .05$ level.

Sub-Problems: ACSI-28

Coping Skills Sub-Scales

CS7. What difference exists pretest to posttest between treatment group and control group in athletic coping skills as measured by coping with adversity among Division I NCAA female swimmers?

Statistical Hypothesis: Coping with Adversity

CSHo7. No significant difference was found pretest to posttest between treatment group and control group in athletic coping skills as measured by coping with adversity among Division I NCAA female swimmers.

A significant difference was found in the interaction of Time X Group on the coping with adversity sub-scale after a twelve-week coaching intervention Wilk's Lambda $F(1,48) = 4.17, p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$. Treatment group's coping with adversity score increased from a pretest score of $9.13 \pm .50$ to a posttest score of $10.65 \pm .40$ while the control group score showed no change from a pretest score $9.15 \pm .46$ to a posttest score of $9.50 \pm .36$ (See Table 10).

Table 10*Difference Over Time Between Groups on Coping with Adversity ACSI-28*

	Pretest Mean	SD	Posttest Mean	SD
Treatment Group	9.13 _a	.50	10.65 _b	.40
Control Group	9.15 _a	.46	9.50 _a	.36

Note 1. Means with different subscripts differ significantly at $p < .05$ level.

CS8. What difference exists pretest to posttest between treatment group and control group in athletic coping skills as measured by concentration disruption among Division I NCAA female swimmers?

Statistical Hypothesis: Concentration Disruption

CSHo8. No difference was found pretest to posttest between treatment group and control group in athletic coping skills as measured by concentration disruption among Division I NCAA female swimmers.

No significant difference was found in the interaction of Time X Group on concentration disruption sub-scale after a twelve-week coaching intervention Wilk's Lambda $F(1,48) = 2.03$, $p < .16$, partial $\eta^2 = .00$. No change occurred in the treatment group from a pretest score of $8.17 \pm .56$ to a posttest score of $7.49 \pm .54$. The control group also saw no change from the pretest score of $7.92 \pm .52$ to a posttest score of $8.22 \pm .50$ (See Table 11).

Table 11*Difference Over Time Between Groups on Coping with Adversity ACSI-28*

	Pretest Mean	SD	Posttest Mean	SD
Treatment Group	8.17 _a	.56	7.49 _a	.52
Control Group	7.92 _a	.52	8.22 _a	.50

Note 1. Means with different subscripts differ significantly at $p < .05$ level.

CS9. What difference exists pretest to posttest between treatment group and control group in athletic coping skills as measured by freedom from worry among Division I NCAA female swimmers?

Statistical Hypothesis: Freedom from Worry

CSHo9. No difference was found pretest to posttest between treatment group and control group in athletic coping skills as measured by freedom from worry among Division I NCAA female swimmers.

No significant difference found in the interaction of Time X Group on freedom from worry sub-scale after a twelve-week coaching intervention Wilk's Lambda $F(1,48) = .83$, $p < .37$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$. No change occurred in the treatment group from a pretest score of $8.04 \pm .57$ to a posttest score of $8.65 \pm .61$. No change occurred in the control group from a pretest score of $7.96 \pm .53$ to a posttest score of $7.96 \pm .59$ (See Table 12).

Table 12

Difference Over Time Between Groups on Freedom from Worry ACSI-28

	Pretest Mean	SD	Posttest Mean	SD
Treatment Group	8.04 _a	.57	8.65 _a	.61
Control Group	7.96 _a	.53	7.96 _a	.59

Note 1. Means with different subscripts differ significantly at $p < .05$ level.

CC10. What difference exists pretest to posttest between treatment group and control group in athletic coping skills as measured by coachability among Division I NCAA female swimmers?

Statistical Hypothesis: Coachability

CSHo10. No difference was found pretest to posttest between treatment group one and control group in athletic coping skills as measured by coachability among Division I NCAA female swimmers.

No significant difference was found between the interaction on Time X Group on the coachability sub-scale after a twelve-week coaching intervention Wilk's Lambda $F(1,48) = .00$, $p < .99$, partial $\eta^2 = .14$. No change occurred from the treatment group pretest score of

14.96 \pm .42 to posttest score of 14.74 \pm .42. No change occurred either in the control group pretest score of 13.59 \pm .39 to a posttest score of 13.37 \pm .38. (See Table 13).

Table 13

Difference Over Time Between Groups on Coachability with ACSI-28

	Pretest Mean	SD	Posttest Mean	SD
Treatment Group	14.96 _a	.42	14.74 _a	.42
Control Group	13.59 _a	.39	13.37 _a	.38

Note 1. Means with different subscripts differ significantly at $p < .05$ level.

Summary of Exploratory Results of Subscales from SAS-2 and ACSI-28

This study's findings were limited by the results collected from the SAS-2 and ACSI-28. While the initial hypotheses concerned anxiety and coping skills as singular variables, both instruments consisted of subscales exploring deeper psychological concepts. After the principal investigator explored the initial results as reported in Chapter Four, it was decided that further targeted variables would be examined on an exploratory basis using a repeated measures ANOVA. The SAS-2 consisted of three subscales testing somatic anxiety, freedom from worry, and concentration disruption (Smith, Cumming & Smoll, 2006). Somatic anxiety is incredibly individualized and not relevant to the current study so therefore was not considered as a targeted variable. The ACSI-28 is composed of seven different subscales in only its 28 items. The subscales consisted of coachability, confidence and motivation, freedom from worry, concentration disruption, goal setting and mental preparation, peaking under pressure, and coping with adversity (Smith, Smoll, Schutz & Ptacek, 1995). Coachability, freedom from worry, concentration disruption, and coping with adversity were targeted variables because the intentionality of the intervention hoped to affect these psychological measures. Confidence and motivation, goal setting and mental preparation, and peaking under pressure were not targeted because these measures were not specific goals of the intervention.

When further examining the targeted variables in the SAS-2 and ACSI-28 two subscales either approached or found significant differences between the treatment group and the

control group. In SAS-2 a significant change was found in the freedom from worry subscale (see Table 8). In the ACSI-28 a significant difference was found concerning the coping with adversity sub-scale (see Table 10). The results seem to support that a twelve-week intentional coaching intervention focusing on the subjective lived experience of the individual athlete may alleviate worry and increase ability to cope with difficult situations. However, more research with larger sample sizes needs to be conducted to verify these initial promising results.

Implications, Recommendations, and Conclusion

This study originated from a pressing and immediate need that was written on the unhappy, anxious, and desperate faces of scores of athletes encountered by the researcher/coach over the course of the last ten years. Witnessing athletes who once loved their sport sobbing uncontrollably became not only heartbreaking but incredibly alarming. How could elite sport, once so joyous, cause so much pain? In the summer of 2020, the researcher/coach created the twelve-week phenomenological reflection journal prompts knowing the desperate need to help athletes entering a season of the likes they have never known. COVID-19 took the growing angst among athletes and draped them in a cloak of uncertainty and fear.

The implications of this twelve-week systematic coaching intervention are clear. Coaches have a moral duty, to, at a minimum, set aside time from their training week to pay attention to the subjective lived experience of athletes in their charge. If we believe that the athletes in the water are body/subjects (Kretchmar, 1975; Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 1964; Standal & Moe, 2011), then coaches must honor the interconnectedness of the entire experience of the individual, the medium, the sport, and the community. This can only be accomplished by bracketing the athlete's experience in a manner that reduces the true essence of the experience to be explored. Therefore, phenomenological reduction allows us a pathway to explore this essence (Husserl, 1962; Moustakas, 1994), but coaches need the training and patience to assist. If this does not occur, athletes are left rudderless with no direction and no purpose other than being cogs in the machine of college athletics.

The quantitative results of this coaching intervention are encouraging. By thoughtfully and systematically reducing the athlete's experience, every week for three months, trait anxiety diminished and coping skills increased. However, when one explores

the 188 pages (see Appendix F) of phenomenological journals composed by the treatment group, the power of this exploration becomes self-evident. Elite athletes have a need for their voices to be heard (Burton & Raedeke, 2008), to be authenticated (Heidegger, 1953, 1996), and to find value, truth, and essence in the experience of their sport to which they have devoted a significant amount of their Body/Subject young lives (Kretchmar, 1975, 1994).

While the results of this study are encouraging, the sample size remains too small to draw conclusions beyond what has essentially become a pilot study. Therefore, this pedagogical approach to coaching needs to be replicated and expanded in an effort to assist both athletes and coaches. In order to replicate this study, several recommendations need to occur:

- 1) This current study's weekly reflection modules are sport specific to swimming. With few changes, the curriculum could be tailored to different sports or sports in general.
- 2) As acknowledged as a limitation in this current study, the researcher/coach possessed extensive educational training in both existential philosophy and educational theory. As such, additional coaches/researchers will need to be trained in the methodology of this phenomenological approach prior to the implementation of additional interventions. This could occur either at the beginning of the intervention or as a mentoring throughout the intervention. Stoll and the Center for ETHICS* have proven the effectiveness of this approach with the curriculum design from the Winning with Character intervention program (Stoll, Beller & Hahm, 2004).
- 3) One strength of the intervention was the relationship between the coach and athlete as dancing partners throughout the three month exploration (Gill, 1993). This was accomplished in large part through what Garrison would refer to as an ethic of *eros* (Garrison, 1997). The coach teaches with love and vulnerability which is not a comfortable approach in elite level athletics. Therefore, flexibility in the weekly curriculum for the personality of the coach to be intertwined with reflection topics and lectures will need to occur. Additionally, a coaching

education prior to intervention will need to occur if the practitioner does not possess a background in sport philosophy or pedagogy.

- 4) Responding to the weekly journals takes on average between three-five hours of the coach's freetime that could be used for practice preparation, game planning, or other seemingly important sport related needs. Thus, additional coach/researchers need to embrace the importance of devoting a considerable amount of time to this reflection and response process. Coaches who decide to implement this intervention need as their goal the health and well-being of the athletes and not simply increase in performance due to lower levels of anxiety. Simply coaches will have to believe in the moral mission of the intervention for it to be effective (Stoll, Beller & Hahm, 2004).
- 5) The only two variables tested in this current study were trait anxiety (SAS-2) and athletic coping skills (ACSI-28). In the exploratory results we acknowledged that the over abundance of subscales (particularly in the ACSI-28) may have influenced the effectiveness of the instrument. Thus, exploring the possibility of a different instrument to measure coping skills or the addition of other variables like enjoyment, buy-in, spirituality, and motivation could add more depth to results.
- 6) The current study gathered 188 pages of subjective data (see Appendix F) in first-person phenomenological accounts of the athletic lived experience. For future research, a systematic protocol for closer examination of qualitative results may allow for a better determination of the effectiveness of the intervention. Yet a content analysis of these phenomenological journal accounts would potentially lose the power of the reflective reduction. Additionally, to classify these first-person written responses into "meaning units" like the work of Schumacher et al. (2016) with channel swimmers would potentially objectify the responses and eliminate the power of the authentic voice.
- 7) In the spring of 2022, athletes who had been associated with the first intervention requested that the curriculum be implemented again. Thus in the fall of 2022, a new twelve-week coaching intervention began.⁵² In August of 2022, a grant was

⁵² This continuation of the intentional coaching intervention was approved under the same IRB as the 2020 intervention. Additionally, the application to the Templeton Foundation also falls under the same IRB approval.

submitted to the Templeton Foundation to extend this study for an additional three years. Finally, a tradebook to educate coaches on the potential effectiveness of this approach to intentional coaching may be required and desirable.

Conclusion

The creation of the twelve-week systematic coaching intervention originated from a need to reverse the tide of commodification of athletes and rehumanize the sporting experience in a manner that alleviates anxiety, increases coping, but most importantly grows the athlete's overall health and well-being. As witnessed by the alarming amounts of self-inflicted deaths from collegiate athletes in the spring of 2022, an existential crisis exists in college sports today. Coaches, administrators, athletic trainers, and college presidents have a moral obligation and duty to help these at-risk athletes reconnect with their sport on a deeper and ontological level. The phenomenological reduction created in this coaching intervention is a pathway that can be utilized by coaches, willing to take the time, to assist their athletes in becoming healthier and more fulfilled versions of themselves through their lived experience in their sport.

Epilogue

I am a moral educator. Yet, for the first fifteen years of my career I had no idea that was the case. I assumed that coaching NCAA Division I swimming consisted of training elite athletes to swim faster than their opponents. I was pretty good at that too. My teams swam fast. Still, I always enjoyed the interaction with the athletes. I loved watching them figure things out. I loved watching their joy when they achieved a new athletic standard. I loved challenging them to be better. What I did not completely understand was that the challenge to be better was really a challenge to be a better and more authentic version of their true self. A graduating senior dropped me a card recently.

Words cannot express how much you, the team, and the last four years have meant to me... [A]fter my last race, sure, I was ugly crying, but I did not care what time I went. The best way to describe how I felt was content. I am so grateful for the opportunity to grow, learn and have fun alongside you, and 20-25 other amazing girls. The positive, caring environment you create on this team is so unique...[Y]ou are like my father away from home and our relationship means the world to me...[I] am so proud of the woman I am today, and a lot of it is thanks to you (personal communication, March 2020).

Coaching is a moral mission. However, collegiate athletics has lost its way within the enormous magnitude of the financial deck of cards built on the backs of mostly young, African American males in revenue sports (Powell, 2008). Our collective approach to coaching outcome centered sports is taking a huge toll on not only the mental health of scores of young athletes but on their core existential sense of self (Fagan, 2017). Simply, coaches have a moral imperative to right this wrong.

One of the most successful athletes with whom I ever worked, wrote me a letter after she completed her storied swimming career.

It would do you a disservice to say thank you for being my coach. Because that makes it about the sport, which it wasn't really all about. Thank you for always believing in me, even when I didn't believe in myself. Thank you for understanding me. As much as my mom loves me, I know for a fact she doesn't understand me because she tells me all the time. Thank you for indulging my random conversations about books. Thank you for always wanting to know my analogies—even if they

weren't always on par. Thank you for playing jazz music in your van rather than rap. Thank you for pushing me to be a better roommate, friend, daughter, and sister... [T]hank you so much for everything you have done. And know that those words hold more weight than I can begin to express. You are truly the best professor I've ever had (Personal communication, April 2015).

As thoughtful and heartfelt as these thank you notes seem, I have also witnessed my share of pain, tears, anxiety, and depression among the many athletes with whom I have worked. Often it appears that the very sport these young women love stands as the cause of their pain. Yet the scores of coaches I have had the pleasure of knowing over the past thirty years in athletics are, for the most part, excellent people who care about their athletes. The disconnect occurs because of the lack of education for coaches in how to appreciate the existential aspect of the sporting experience.

A parent of a former swimmer sent me an email a few months back. Her daughter was a tremendous swimmer who did not complete her athletic career due to her mental health. Yet this mother appreciated her daughter's experience.

...[I] can't tell you how much your presence in (*daughter's name's*) life has meant to me and her! You kept your word. You walked your talk. You put her well-being above all with sincerity. That might be all in a day's work for you, but it is rare and incredibly valuable...[F]or what it is worth, I regard you as an exceptional coach and human being. I will always hold your kindness, authenticity, and generosity in gratitude (Personal communication, June 2020).

I do not feel that I care about my athletes any more than all the other career coaches I have encountered in my life. Nor am I "exceptional" as the quote above suggests. Instead, what changed my coaching was my introduction to moral development and character education six years ago. Reading thousands of pages, writing hundreds more, and taking time to listen, talk to, and reflect on the experience of the swimmers I coached everyday allowed me to experience coaching differently. Coaches need to know that there is another manner to help their athletes. They need to believe that taking time to bring these young people back to their own unique subjective experience in the sport can not only alleviate trait anxiety but also increase joy, love, and coping skills. The by-product of this coaching education should be successful performance as well. Yet, as these testimonials indicate, the performance is really

an afterthought of the entire “lived experience” of the athlete once they have the skills to really reflect.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval



Institutional Review Board
875 Perimeter Drive, MS 3010
Moscow, ID 83844-3010
Phone: 208-885-6162
Fax: 208-885-6014
Email: irb@uidaho.edu

August 26, 2020

To: Sharon K. Stoll

Cc: Mark Sowa

From: Sharon K. Stoll, Chair

University of Idaho Institutional Review Board

Title: Existential Coaching Education: A Pedagogical Pathway to Alleviate Anxiety and Increase Coping Skills of Collegiate Female Swimmers

Protocol: 20-135, Reference: 010200

Approved: 08/26/2020

Due Date: 08/25/2021

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board at the University of Idaho, I am pleased to inform you that the protocol for this research project is approved as offering minimal risk to human subjects. Please be sure to comply with CDC and local Public Health guidelines for Covid-19, as well as the University's guidance at <https://www.uidaho.edu/vandal-health-clinic/coronavirus/research>.

Effective January 21, 2019, minimal risk research protocols that were reviewed and approved under expedited procedures will no longer be required to be renewed on an annual basis (continuing review). Since these protocols do not expire, we have implemented an annual study status check procedure. VERAS will send an email prior to the annual approval date for the study asking you to complete the Study Status Check and Closure Form to help keep the records accurate.

This study may be conducted according to the protocol described in the application. Amendments must be submitted for IRB approval prior to implementing changes. Research that has been approved by the IRB may be subject to further appropriate review and approval or disapproval by officials of the Institution. Every effort should be made to ensure that the project is conducted in a manner consistent with the three fundamental principles identified in the Belmont Report: respect for persons; beneficence; and justice. As Principal Investigator, you are responsible for ensuring compliance with all applicable FERPA regulations, University of Idaho policies, and state and federal regulations. The Principal Investigator is responsible for ensuring that all study personnel have completed the online human subjects training requirement.

Federal regulations require researchers to follow specific procedures in a timely manner. For the protection of all concerned, the IRB calls your attention to the following obligations that you have as Principal Investigator of this study.

1. For any changes to the study, an IRB Protocol Amendment Request Form must be submitted to the IRB. The amendment request must be reviewed and approved before implementation.
2. Any unanticipated/adverse events or problems occurring as a result of participation in this study must be reported immediately to the IRB.
3. Principal investigators are responsible for ensuring that informed consent is properly documented in accordance with 45 CFR 46.116.
4. Please complete the Study Status Check and Closure Form in VERAS when the project is completed.



Institutional Review Board
875 Perimeter Drive, MS 3010
Moscow, ID 83844-3010
Phone: 208-885-6162
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Email: irb@uidaho.edu

August 12, 2020

To: Sharon K. Stoll

Cc: Mark Sowa, Ph.D.

From: University of Idaho Institutional Review Board

Approval Date: August 12, 2020

Title: An Objective, Systematic, Observation of Coaching Styles of Head Collegiate Women's Swimming Coaches

Protocol: 20-134, Reference: 010201

Exempt under Category 2 at 45 CFR 46.104(d)(2).

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board at the University of Idaho, I am pleased to inform you that the protocol for this research project has been certified as exempt under the category listed above. You must conduct research in accordance with the policies at: <https://www.uidaho.edu/vandal-healthclinic/coronavirus/research>, as well as [Public Health and CDC guidance](#).

This certification is valid only for the study protocol as it was submitted. Studies certified as Exempt are not subject to continuing review and this certification does not expire. However, if changes are made to the study protocol, you must submit the changes through [VERAS](#) for review before implementing the changes. Amendments may include but are not limited to, changes in study population, study personnel, study instruments, consent documents, recruitment materials, sites of research, etc.

As Principal Investigator, you are responsible for ensuring compliance with all applicable FERPA regulations, University of Idaho policies, state and federal regulations. Every effort should be made to ensure that the project is conducted in a manner consistent with the three fundamental principles identified in the Belmont Report: respect for persons; beneficence; and justice. The Principal Investigator is responsible for ensuring that all study personnel



have completed the online human subjects training requirement. Please complete the *Continuing Review and Closure Form* in VERAS when the project is completed.

You are required to notify the IRB in a timely manner if any unanticipated or adverse events occur during the study, if you experience an increased risk to the participants, or if you have participants withdraw or register complaints about the study.

IRB Exempt Category (Categories) for this submission:

Category 2: Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met: i. The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; ii. Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or iii. The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by .111(a)(7).

Appendix B: Informed Consent for Intervention

Existential Coaching Education: A Pedagogical Pathway to Alleviate Anxiety and Increase Coping Skills of Collegiate Female Swimmers

Informed Consent for Sport Anxiety Scale-2 (SAS-2) and Athletic Coping Skills Inventory-28 (ACSI-28)

Dr. Sharon Kay Stoll, from the Movement Science Department at the University of Idaho, and Mark J. Sowa, Ph.D. candidate from the University of Idaho, are conducting a research study. The purpose of the research is to examine the effect of a twelve-week systematic intentional existential coaching intervention with college aged women swimmers on trait anxiety and athletic coping skills. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a Division I female swimmer.

Your participation will involve the completion of two different surveys, one testing your level of trait anxiety, the other measuring your athletic coping skills. The SAS-2 and the ACSI-28 should take less than ten minutes to complete. The SAS-2 includes questions such as “Before I compete in sports, I find it hard to concentrate on the game.” The ACSI-28 includes questions like, “When a coach tells me how to correct a mistake I’ve made, I tend to take it personally and feel upset.” In both surveys you will be asked how often you may feel a certain way. Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate. You can refuse to answer any of the questions at any time. There are no names or identifying information associated with your responses. There are no known risks in this study, but some individuals may experience discomfort or loss of privacy when answering questions. Data will through Qualtrics which is a secured site.

The findings from this project will provide information on how to alleviate trait anxiety and increase coping skills in swimmers. If published, results will be presented in summary form only.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to call Sharon K. Stoll, Ph.D. at (208) 885-2103 or Mark J. Sowa at (603) 496-0642. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, or about what you should do in case of any harm to you, or if you want to obtain information or offer input you may call the Office of Research Assurances at (208) 885-6340 or irb@uidaho.edu.

By clicking OK you certify that you are at least 18 years of age and agree to participate in the above described research study.

Existential Coaching Education: A Pedagogical Pathway to Alleviate Anxiety and Increase Coping Skills of Collegiate Female Swimmers

Informed Consent for Sport Anxiety Scale-s (SAS-2) and Athletic Coping Skills Inventory-28 (ACSI-28)

Dr. Sharon Kay Stoll, from the Movement Science Department at the University of Idaho is conducting a research study. The purpose of the research is to examine the effect of a twelve-week systematic intentional existential coaching intervention with college aged women swimmers on trait anxiety and athletic coping skills. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a Division I female swimmer.

Your participation will involve the completion of two different surveys, one testing your level of trait anxiety, the other measuring your athletic coping skills. The SAS-2 and the ACSI-28 should take less than ten minutes to complete. The SAS-2 includes questions such as “Before I compete in sports, I find it hard to concentrate on the game.” The ACSI-28 includes questions like, “When a coach tells me how to correct a mistake I’ve made, I tend to take it personally and feel upset.” In both surveys you will be asked how often you may feel a certain way. Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate. You can refuse to answer any of the questions at any time. There are no names or identifying information associated with your responses. There are no known risks in this study, but some individuals may experience discomfort or loss of privacy when answering questions. Data will through Qualtrics which is a secured site.

The findings from this project will provide information on how to alleviate trait anxiety and increase coping skills in swimmers. If published, results will be presented in summary form only.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to call Sharon K. Stoll, Ph.D. at (208) 885-2103. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, or about what you should do in case of any harm to you, or if you want to obtain information or offer input you may call the Office of Research Assurances at (208) 885-6340 or irb@uidaho.edu.

By clicking OK you certify that you are at least 18 years of age and agree to participate in the above described research study.

Name of Adult Participant

Signature of Adult Participant

Date

Name of Research Team Member

Signature of Research Team Member

Date

Appendix C: Informed Consent for Coaching Observation

An Objective, Systematic, Observation of Coaching Styles of Head Collegiate Women's Swimming Coaches

Informed Consent

Sharon Kay Stoll, Ph.D., from the Movement Science Department at the University of Idaho, and Doctoral Candidate Mark J. Sowa are conducting a research study. The purpose of the research is to conduct an objective and systematic observation of coaching style of head collegiate women's swimming coaches in order to verify the amount of time devoted to four measurable standards within a typical training session. We would like to conduct a systematic and objective observation of your coaching style because you are an experienced head swimming coach.

Your participation will involve allowing our researchers to observe your coaching style and the amount of time you devote to four objective and measurable components of coaching. The observation of your coaching should take none of your time and be noninvasive to your coaching duties. The observation of your coaching includes our researcher videoing a typical training session. Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate. There are no names or identifying information associated with our observations of your coaching and no judgements of effectiveness, ethical considerations, or value assessments will be made. We will document time spent on a) practice management b) motor skill/technical instruction c) monitoring of training speed d) reinforcement. There are no known risks in this study, but some individuals may experience discomfort or loss of privacy when being observed. Data will be kept confidential, and no identifiers will be released.

The findings from this project only verify the coaching style of each swimming coach observed. If published, results will be presented in summary form only.

If you have any questions about this research project, please feel free to call Dr. Sharon Kay Stoll at (208) 885-2103 or Mark J. Sowa at (603) 496-0642. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, or about what you should do in case of any harm to you, or if you want to obtain information or offer input you may call the Office of Research Assurances at (208) 885-6340 or irb@uidaho.edu.

By signing this document, you certify that you are at least 18 years of age and agree to participate in the above described research study.

Name of Adult Participant

Signature of Adult Participant

Date

Name of Research Team Member

Signature of Research Team Member

Date

Appendix D

Weekly Lessons for Intentional Coaching Intervention: Week Number One

Learning to Swim:

The key idea is that here is that knowledge is not a thing to be possessed but an activity to be engaged in. In other words, cognition happens, takes place in an ongoing fashion in the interaction between and among knowers and the known... [K]nowing is quite similar to dancing or any other active, relational phenomenon (in our case swimming). Dancing creates both the dance itself and the dancers, in the sense that it is incorporated into and thus participates in the ongoing development of their identity. Knowing, too, participates in the evolution of both the known and the knower; each constantly being altered by the interaction between them, by the cognitive symbiotic relationality (Gill, 1993, p. 68).

Every week we will introduce a new topic for you to think about, discuss, reflect upon, and eventually write about. Our goal is to get you to think about your sport in a deeper more profound way. You will not be in this journey alone. Like the quote above states, we will dance together throughout this process and create something special and unique to you. Before we enter the deep end of our pool, we need to dip a toe into the water and define some terms that will help us “stay afloat.”

Words to Consider

Being: Who you are. Not just your personality or consciousness but, who you are while you find yourself “in the world.”

Embodied: We know the world through our bodies. This is why we enjoy sport so much.

Lived experience: Your experience in this world is unique to you. However, your teammates will have similar experiences that will help you gain perspective and know the world better.

Competence: Knowing that you have skill and mastery of an activity.

Autonomy: You are an independent person who has control over your own life.

Relatedness: How you interact with others, activities, and the world around you.

Knowing: Knowing is not a finished activity but a constant process of finding the world.

Coping: How do you deal with adversity, stress, frustration, or anxiety.

Reflection: Learning to swim

During this past week you have heard from your coach about his early experience with the sport of swimming in his backyard pool in Rhode Island during the late 1970s. He described his relationship with his mother (who was the town's swimming instructor,) *being* able to finally “see” underwater, and the freedom that came with that realization. We also read from the book *Why We Swim* which gave us another perspective. Finally, you also shared some experiences with your teammates, illustrating how unique our “lived experiences” are with the sport of swimming.

At some point when you learned to swim you fell in love with the water. You began a “relationship” and a “dance” with not just a sport but with the water itself. How would you describe your relationship with the water? How has your relationship grown and changed over time?

There is no wrong way to approach this reflection. Think about how you felt, how you coped, the sights and smells, your relationships with others, your fears and your pride of learning something new. Enjoy!!

Week Two

Becoming a swimmer:

The “culture” of the boxer (in our case swimmer) is not made up of finite sum of discrete information, of notions that can be transmitted by words and normative models that would exist independently of their application. Rather, it is formed of a diffuse complex of postures and (physical and mental) gestures that, being continually (re)produced in and through the very functioning of the gym (or pool), exist in a sense only in action, and in traces that this action leaves within (and upon) bodies (Wacquant, 2004, p. 59).

The culture of swimming is unique to our sport. There is a feel and smell of entering a pool deck. There is even a way that “real” swimmers walk, wear their hair, put on their caps, or wear their suits that is different from the occasional recreational swimmer. A swim practice has certain sounds, tempos, and cadences. When a swim team is training, the pool’s air even feels different.

Words to Consider:

Being: Who are you when you swim?

Embodied: What and how are we learning when we swim?

Lived Experience: Your experience in the water is unique and special to you.

Reflection: Becoming a swimmer

During this past week we spent a good amount of time talking about what it means to “be” a swimmer. On Monday your coach talked to you about when he decided he would become a coach as he sat and watched the sea lions swim at the National Zoo in Washington DC. We also read from the book *Body and Soul* which described how Lois Wacquant “became” a boxer. On Friday you had some time to listen to your teammates talk about the culture and being a swimmer. All of these stories began with a choice then transitioned into something more intimate and part of the person’s *being*.

Why do you choose to return to the water day after day, week after week? Described what being a swimmer means to you and how a day in the water can be unique and different.

Remember, there is no wrong way to approach this reflection. Think about how you felt, how you coped, the sights and smells, your relationships with others, your fears and your pride of learning something new. Enjoy!!

Week Three

The daily dance or sometimes grind:

Knowing, knowers, and the known are all a function of symbiotic processes, they give rise to and sustain one another, even as dancing, dancers, and the dance all yield and define one another (Gill, 1993, p. 214).

Words to consider:

The Dance: When dancing with someone, each person is as important as the partner. The music, the floor, and the dance itself cannot be separated from the experience.

Practice: You have swum countless hours in a pool. You often refer to this as practice.

Endurance: Swimming is often called an endurance sport. What are you enduring?

Reflection: The daily dance (sometimes grind)

We began this week talking about the idea of practice or training. On Monday your coach attempted to break down all the various things that occur during a practice, sights, sounds, smells, cadence, tears, laughter, exploration, mindlessness and mindfulness. On Wednesday, we read a short passage from *Spirituality of Sport* that described the beautiful last practice of two collegiate rowers witnessed by their coach. On Friday, you got into small groups of teammates to discuss things that occur when you train together.

When you think about all the many possibilities that happen in the pool every day and compare that to our metaphor of the “dance” the “grind” of training transforms into something beautiful or even spiritual as described by Saint Sing. Describe your daily dance of training and how endurance could be transformed into exploration.

Remember, there is no wrong way to approach this reflection. Think about how you felt, how you coped, the sights and smells, your relationships with others, your fears and your pride of learning something new. Enjoy!!

Week Four

Playing in the water:

When the process of sport remains intrinsic rather than relying on extrinsic rewards to justify participation, it can be considered play despite the competitive element. Much of our sport/play is highly structured and is often controlled by people outside the playing situation. In this sense, the players lose control of their own play process. To the degree that the player loses control, the play element is also diminished. A third factor to be considered is the emphasis on consequences. While the outcome of sport is important, if it becomes the overriding concern, play is lost. Strong emphasis on outcome rarely allows the individual to suspend the realities of the world; so when the goals are primary, the situation may be better described as work rather than play (Thomas, 1983, p. 56).

Words to consider:

Play: An activity done for the sake of the activity itself. Simply, the goal of play is to play.

Work: A labor intensive activity performed with an extrinsic goal to be obtained.

Intrinsic: Something that has value related to one's sense of self.

Extrinsic: Something that has objective value.

Reflection: Playing in the water

This week we discussed the difference between work and play. On Monday, your coach led a discussion concerning elements of play, using the example of “tag.” On Wednesday, we read from *Sport in a Philosophic Context*, by Carolyn Thomas. While this book is a little more academic, our goal was to begin to think about how we play in the water. On Friday, we “played” a game of sharks and minnows and had a lot of laughs. When you fell in love with swimming, your “dance” in the water was mostly play. Describe what it was like to play in the pool when you were young. We played again on Friday, what was your “lived” experience *being-in-the-water*? Can being more playful with your sport help you cope with difficult times? Please explain.

Remember, there is no wrong way to approach this reflection. Think about how you felt, how you coped, the sights and smells, your relationships with others, your fears and your pride of learning something new. Enjoy!!

Week Five

Control:

To SURF (in our case swim) is to acquiesce in a wave's shifting moments, so as to go along *with* its flow. How does the surfer (swimmer) do this? In part by giving up the need for control. By throwing off a central preoccupation of modern society, which is to stay in control, to master nature, and to tame an uncertain future, the surfer (swimmer) finds a beautiful way of being effectual in a relative powerlessness before a sublime ocean (James, 2017, p. 66).

Words to consider:

Control: A feeling of being autonomous and free.

Mastery: Becoming and expert at a certain activity.

Freedom: Being able to determine one's journey without limitations.

Reflection: Control

We began this week with a discussion about things we can and cannot control as athletes. Again, the act of floating serves as our perfect example as we need to trust that the water will be there to support us while we also control and manipulate our bodies to stay afloat. We entered into a sport, that as land mammals, we are not meant to do. Initially, swimming was a way to stay alive if one found themselves submerged in water. We therefore need to both trust and respect water. On Wednesday, we read from Aaron James' *Surfing with Sartre* to better understand a surfer's need for control and her abandonment of that control to the whims of the ocean. On Friday we briefly met in small groups to gain others perspective on their idea of control.

Think about what you can and cannot control as an athlete, woman, and individual. Describe how you feel when you are in control of your swimming, emotions, and life. Describe how you feel when things appear to be beyond your control. Like the surfer who rides a wave, what could be the value of "acquiescing" to things outside of our control?

Remember, there is no wrong way to approach this reflection. Think about how you felt, how you coped, the sights and smells, your relationships with others, your fears and your pride of learning something new. Enjoy!!

Week Six

Flow:

At that special level all sorts of odd things happen. The game would be in a white heat of competition, and yet somehow I wouldn't feel competitive—which is a miracle in itself. I'd be putting out maximum effort, straining, coughing up parts of my lungs as we ran, and yet I never felt the pain. The game would move so quickly that every fake, cut and pass would be surprising, and yet nothing could surprise me. It was almost as if we were playing in slow motion. During those spells I could almost sense how the next play would develop and where the next shot would be taken. Even before the other team brought the ball in bounds I could feel it so keenly that I'd want to shout to my teammates...[I] always felt then that I not only knew all the Celtics by heart but also all the opposing players, and they all knew me. There have been many times in my career when I felt moved or joyful, but these were the moments when I had chills pulsing up and down my spine (Russell, & Branch, 1979, pp. 156-157).

Words to consider:

Flow: An optimal experience.

Mastery: The ongoing process of becoming an expert at an activity or task.

Embodied: Knowing the world through our bodies.

Skill: The necessary tools that comprise a task.

Reflection: Flow

This week we began by talking about the seeming contradictions that encompass “flow” experiences. For some, time seems to speed up, for others, things appear to be in slow motion. Some people experience a heightened sense of the entirety of the experience while others have a singular vision. What is common among all these flow experiences is that we all desire to get there, and the harder we try to achieve flow, the more elusive it seems. On Wednesday your coach read from one of Bill Russel's memoirs which gave an excellent description of the eleven-time champion's experience with flow. On Friday, you got into small groups to discuss some of the common feelings we get in flow states.

Flow appears to be the perfect word for a sport like swimming. Water “flows” as it moves. When we enter the water, we have to go along with this flow. If we fight it, we are literally

“swimming upstream.” Swimmers enter into and out of flow states constantly. Over the last month and a half, we have reflected on our relationship with the water. When you are “flowing” in the pool describe your being-in-the-water. Reflect on what the experience of flowing in water is like. Describe before you dive in, while your swimming, after you exit the pool. You do not need to be racing to be flowing but if flow occurs in a race describe that as well.

Remember, there is no wrong way to approach this reflection. Think about how you felt, how you coped, the sights and smells, your relationships with others, your fears and your pride of learning something new. Enjoy!!

Week Seven

The Unknown: “Sweet tension of uncertainty”

Unfamiliar territory that possesses us to venture into such a place—Personally I am curious. In fact, I write because I am curious. And to that I can also state; I run into the unknown for the same reasons. A good Long Run can take you to places you’ve never visited before. Though it is a challenge and can leave you gasping for air, it is nothing more than another inconvenience. If you can’t portage the canoe, or forge the river, you’ve taken the wrong road. Should you not be willing to go the extra mile you shall never know what may lie in wait? If we all had stopped to map our life I can’t help but wonder how many would have turned around when faced by even the slightest obstacle. Condemned to curiosity—resigned to risk (Wharton, 2004, p. 64).

Words to consider:

Being: Who you are. Not just your personality or consciousness but, who you are while you find yourself “in the world.”

Embodied: We know the world through our bodies. This is why we enjoy sport so much.

Lived experience: Your experience in this world is unique to you. However, your teammates will have similar experiences that will help you gain perspective and know the world better.

Anxiety: Fear and tension that is the direct result of uncertainty.

Coping: How we manage ourselves through difficult times.

Reflection: The Unknown

This week we discussed that one of the most primal components to sport is the uncertainty that is an essential to the tension of the contest. We enter the arena, the court, or in our case the pool, not knowing how things are going to turn out. This can be both exciting and scary at the same time. Referred to as the “sweet tension of uncertainty,” the unknown of sport is what calls us back to the activity and creates anxiety if left alone to fester (Kretchmar, 1975, 1994).

This week we began by looking out into the abyss of the unknown and discussing how our fears are part of the journey of an examined life. On Wednesday, we read excerpts from Jim Wharton’s *Long Run* to peer inside someone’s intimate and often scary experience with his

sport. On Friday, each of you wrote one thing concerning the unknown that your coach then read to the rest of the team to illustrate that you are not alone in your uncertainty.

It is said that you cannot step into the same river twice because it is always changing. Look inside your unknown with swimming and describe how that sweet tension can be a positive force moving you forward toward learning more about yourself.

Remember, there is no wrong way to approach this reflection. Think about how you felt, how you coped, the sights and smells, your relationships with others, your fears and your pride of learning something new. Enjoy!!

Week Eight

Relationship with Coach:

I looked out at the audience applauding us and wished Coach were among them. His guiding hand at UCLA had only been the start. After that, we developed a friendship that grew closer and closer over the next four decades. We celebrated our triumphs together and helped each other through dark tragedies together. As I grew up, played professional basketball, married, had children, lost loved ones, retired, and changed careers, I never grew away from Coach's influence. Even on that day, the medal hanging heavily around my neck, I knew what he would have said: "Kareem, don't overthink it. Enjoy the moment. Don't let yesterday take up too much of today" (Abdul-Jabbar, 2017, p. 5).

Words to consider:

Teacher: A more experienced "knower" who helps point you in the correct direction.

Coach: Someone who helps guide your "dance" with the water.

Relationship: Interaction with an "other" that is built on an understanding on mutual respect for the other person's autonomy and humanness.

Reflection: Coaching

This week we began with your coach discussing his growth as a coach over the past five years and how his understanding of athletes has changed upon years of study and reflection. On Wednesday we read from Kareem Abdul-Jabbar's memoir of his fifty-year relationship with his coach. On Friday, each of you had an opportunity to "coach" one of your peers for a short time.

For the past two months we have discussed how learning can be a kind of dance between the Knower, the Knowing, and the Known (Gill, 1993). Your coaches throughout your life have been an important partner in this dance. One day you may become a head of a family, an organization, a classroom, or perhaps even a team of your own. Think about how you would like to be perceived as a leader and coach. Describe the environment you would want to create, how you would lead, and some of the important values you would instill in your "team."

Remember, there is no wrong way to approach this reflection. Think about how you felt, how you coped, the sights and smells, your relationships with others, your fears and your pride of learning something new. Enjoy!!

Week Nine

Relationship with Team:

Yet it is important that we not forget that the experience and necessity of moral growth has always been the subject of philosophical reflection... [E]very community (team) has to provide some account and means to initiate their young (teammates) into their moral traditions and activities, and it seems every community (team) finds some way to encourage its members to move from the less good to the better, and from the good to the excellent (Hauerwas, 1981, p. 129).

Words to consider:

Community: A group of individuals who share a common purpose and goal while sharing support systems.

Team: A group of individuals who come together to achieve optimal performance.

Responsibility: A sense of duty.

Value: Something of worth.

Excellence: Something that is optimal.

Reflection: Team

After two months of reflection, we began this week by discussing our collective journey together. For many of us, one of the most important and enjoyable components of our sporting experience is our relationships with our teammates. On Wednesday we read several passages that challenged you to rethink your responsibilities to others and the importance of mutual respect. On Friday, you got into small groups to brainstorm words that describe the “values” of your team.

This week we would like you to describe the characteristics of a team and community. When does a team change into a community? Think about how a team helps individuals become stronger and how a team sustains, nurtures, and grows through experience.

Remember, there is no wrong way to approach this reflection. Think about how you felt, how you coped, the sights and smells, your relationships with others, your fears and your pride of learning something new. Enjoy!!

Week Ten

Relationship to competition:

The great competitors I have played for, coached, and admired have shared a joy derived from the struggle itself—the journey, the contest. They have done so because only in the supreme effort is there an opportunity to summon your best, a personal greatness that cannot be diminished, dismissed, or derided because of a final score or bottom line. Competitive Greatness is not defined by victory nor denied by defeat. It exists in the effort that precedes those two “imposters” as well as their accomplices: fame, fortune, and power—measurements I rejected long ago (Wooden & Jamison, 2005, pp. 52-53).

Words to consider:

Being: Who you are. Not just your personality or consciousness but, who you are while you find yourself “in the world.”

Embodied: We know the world through our bodies. This is why we enjoy sport so much.

Lived experience: Your experience in this world is unique to you. However, your teammates will have similar experiences that will help you gain perspective and know the world better.

Anxiety: Fear and tension that is the direct result of uncertainty.

Coping: How we manage ourselves through difficult times.

Competitor: Individual involved in a “contest.”

Reflection: Competition

On Monday, your coach began the week discussing competition in all its forms utilizing John Wooden’s definition of success as the basis for this reflection. On Wednesday, we discussed each block that comprised Wooden’s Pyramid of Success (Wooden & Jamison, 2005). On Friday, we asked you to write your fears about competition onto a paper without your name and we discussed them as a group.

When you joined your first swim team as a young athlete, competition was fun. Describe your earliest memories of the fun and joy of competition as a swimmer. Reflect on times in this pool when “competition” brought you joy. What are the similarities between the two “lived experiences?”

Remember, there is no wrong way to approach this reflection. Think about how you felt, how you coped, the sights and smells, your relationships with others, your fears and your pride of learning something new. Enjoy!!

Week Eleven

Joy and Happiness:

For each person there are thousands of opportunities, challenges to expand ourselves. Such experiences are not necessarily pleasant at the time they occur. The swimmer's muscles might have ached during his most memorable race, his lungs might have felt like exploding, and he might have been dizzy with fatigue—yet these could have been the best moments of his life. Getting control of life is never easy, and sometimes it can be definitely painful. But in the long run optimal experiences add up to a sense of mastery—or perhaps better, a sense of *participation* in determining the content of life—that comes as close to what is usually meant by happiness as anything else we can conceivably imagine (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, pp. 3-4).

Words to consider:

Control: A feeling of being autonomous and free.

Mastery: Becoming and expert at a certain activity.

Freedom: Being able to determine one's journey without limitations.

Reflection: Joy and Happiness

At the beginning of the week, your coach talked with you about the many moments of joy and happiness that have occurred over the past ten weeks of your swim season. Some of these experiences were with competition but many were not. On Wednesday, we returned to reading *Why We Swim* to remind us about our choice to return again and again to our “dance” with the water. On Friday, your small groups shared one joyous thing with the rest of the team.

Our weekly reflections have brought you time and again back to your experience in the water. Our experiences, like a wave, have both crests and valleys. In order to feel joy, we also must experience pain and sadness. Yet, you still love the water, and you love swimming. Describe this ebb and flow of happiness and heartache with your *being-in-the water* and take us on your path toward joyous swimming.

Remember, there is no wrong way to approach this reflection. Think about how you felt, how you coped, the sights and smells, your relationships with others, your fears and your pride of learning something new. Enjoy!!

Week Twelve

Truth and Essence:

Before our undivided existence the world is true; it exists. The unity, the articulation of both are intermingled. We experience in it a truth which shows through and envelops us rather than being held and circumscribed by our mind (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 6).

Words to consider:

Being: Who you are. Not just your personality or consciousness but, who you are while you find yourself “in the world.”

Embodied: We know the world through our bodies. This is why we enjoy sport so much.

Lived experience: Your experience in this world is unique to you. However, your teammates will have similar experiences that will help you gain perspective and know the world better.

Anxiety: Fear and tension that is the direct result of uncertainty.

Coping: How we manage ourselves through difficult times.

Competitor: Individual involved in a “contest.”

Control: A feeling of being autonomous and free.

Mastery: Becoming and expert at a certain activity.

Freedom: Being able to determine one’s journey without limitations.

Reflection: Truth and Essence

We have spent the past three months reflecting on your personal journey through the sport of swimming. Through our weekly discussions we discovered that your journey and dance have many partners. You have a relationship with the water, a coach, teammates, competitors, and the sport itself. As we head into the midway point of your season this week, we spent a little time every day to acknowledge that your “lived experience” in swimming has truth, meaning, and essence. Describe the meaning of YOUR experience in the water both the beautiful and sublime.

Remember, there is no wrong way to approach this reflection. Think about how you felt, how you coped, the sights and smells, your relationships with others, your fears and your pride of learning something new. Enjoy!!

Appendix E

Coaching Style

- CS15. Based on a valid systematic observation of coaching style, what is the percentage of time devoted to practice management by the treatment coach?
- CS16. Based on a valid systematic observation of coaching style, what is the percentage of time devoted to practice management by the control group coach one?
- CS17. Based on a valid systematic observation of coaching style, what is the percentage of time devoted to practice management by control group coach two?
- CS18. Based on a valid systematic observation of coaching style, what is the percentage of time devoted to motor skill/technical instruction by the treatment coach?
- CS19. Based on a valid systematic observation of coaching style, what is the percentage of time devoted to motor skill/technical instruction by the control group coach one?
- CS20. Based on a valid systematic observation of coaching style, what is the percentage of time devoted to motor skill/technical instruction by control group coach two?
- CS21. Based on a valid systematic observation of coaching style, what is the percentage of time devoted to monitoring training speeds by the treatment coach?
- CS22. Based on a valid systematic observation of coaching style, what is the percentage of time devoted to monitoring training speeds by the control group coach one?
- CS23. Based on a valid systematic observation of coaching style, what is the percentage of time devoted to monitoring training speeds by control group coach two?
- CS24. Based on a valid systematic observation of coaching style, what is the percentage of time devoted to reinforcement by the treatment coach?
- CS25. Based on a valid systematic observation of coaching style, what is the percentage of time devoted to reinforcement by the control group coach one?
- CS26. Based on a valid systematic observation of coaching style, what is the percentage of time devoted to reinforcement by control group coach two?

Statistical Hypothesis

Coaching Style

- Ho15. No difference exists after a valid systematic observation of coaching style between experimental coach and control group one coach.

Ho16. No difference exists after a valid systematic observation of coaching style between experimental coach and control group two coach.

Ho17. No difference exists after a valid systematic observation of coaching style between control group one coach and control group two coach.

Appendix F Intentional Coaching Intervention⁵³

Week One: Learning to Swim

Reflection Prompt

During this past week you have heard from your coach about his early experience with the sport of swimming in his backyard pool in Rhode Island during the late 1970s. He described his relationship with his mother (who was the town’s swimming instructor,) *being* able to finally “see” underwater, and the freedom that came with that realization. We also read from the book *Why We Swim* which gave us another perspective. Finally, you also shared some experiences with your teammates, illustrating how unique our “lived experiences” are with the sport of swimming.

At some point when you learned to swim you fell in love with the water. You began a “relationship” and a “dance” with not just a sport but with the water itself. How would you describe your relationship with the water? How has your relationship grown and changed over time?

Swimmer 1

From a young age, I have always loved to swim and was never afraid of the water. My first vivid memory of swimming was when my family took a 2-week vacation, in Mazatlán, Mexico (I was 4 years old). That was probably my first time in the ocean, and I remember playing in the ocean for hours on end and my family would rotate people to play with me because I never left. I remember the excitement I would get crashing into the little waves and them carrying me ashore. The ocean also was very intriguing to me because I was always curious to know what was underneath me, and no I wasn't afraid of sharks. Once, my family got back from Mexico I began to take more advanced swim lessons to get more time in the water. My swim lessons teacher then convinced my mom that swim team would be a good option for me. A couple years later (I was 7 years old), I joined *YMCA swim team* and met my best friends and had the best time swimming. I looked up to several Olympians especially Missy Franklin and dreamed of swimming in college. I went to a couple UC Berkeley (my

⁵³ The following journal entries are first-handwritten accounts from twenty-five collegiate female swimmers. Spelling has been corrected for the sake of the reader, but grammar remains as originally written to maintain the spirit of the text. Additionally, all identifiers have been changed as best as possible to keep the identity of the athletes concealed. Identifiers are the last names of coaches, all names of athletes, and names of swim clubs. These identifiers will be indicated by *italics* when needed.

dream school at the time) swim camps when I was 11 and 12 to further my swimming and to see where swimming could possibly take me. Then in my later years of swimming, my motivation for swimming in college decreased as the practices became monotonous and I had more pressure on me to be faster. I then lost my passion for swimming. Then, my family took another trip to Mexico, and we decided to take a boat trip to swim with whale sharks. We were very lucky that day because we came across a pod of about a 100 whale sharks! It was the coolest experience swimming next to them because they were huge (around 30 feet) which made me feel a lot smaller in the water. By feeling so small and unbound to anything I began to realize that my struggles in the water were tiny in retrospect. I also reflected back when I was swimming my best and it was because I was having fun and put no pressure on myself. I am excited to start a new journey as a Vandal and to remember to have fun and to minimize the pressure I put on myself.

Swimmer 2

My first memory swimming was when I was really young, I started learning to swim at Hubbard Swim School in Arizona. At the time I was too young to start the classes, but my mom was adamant about having me start swimming early. We had a pool in our backyard, and she wanted to make sure I would be okay if I went into the backyard alone and also for the reason that swimming was really the only activity you could do in the Arizona heat. I don't vividly remember learning to swim but I do remember my instructor putting me underwater for the first time and throwing me into the pool for the first time. Since then, I was launching myself into every pool that I went too. Parents would freak out seeing a young child throw herself into the pool, my parents were never fazed by it because they were used to it and knew I was capable of swimming and being on my own in the water.

At the same complex, I learned to swim they also had a small practice team that was non-competitive that would just show you how to do all the strokes, how to flip turn, and how to dive off the blocks. I eventually got too old to keep swimming there, so it was almost like at that moment swimming was over, I was only able to go into my backyard pool. My parents tried putting me into different sports, but it wasn't anything that I enjoyed. When I was almost 9 one of our family friends told my mom that a swim team was having tryouts soon and that she should enroll me. And since that moment I have been in the pool and honestly don't know anything else. My first meet wasn't anything that I was proud of I was so nervous

I missed one of my races cause I was in the bathroom throwing up. I wanted to quit but I remember my dad asking me, "Are you quitting because it's hard?" and I was silent. The next afternoon he drove me to practice and when he dropped me off, he said, "I am not letting you quit something because it's hard, I will only let you quit if it is something that you don't enjoy". Even this early on I think my dad knew that I had a love for the water and even if he didn't think I was going to come this far he had a feeling that I needed to keep doing it. When I showed up to practice my coach was really surprised, she didn't think I was going to come back, and she has been by my side through all my years of swimming.

Swimming has been a part of my life for almost 12 years, and I can't imagine what my life would have been without it. Yes, I started swimming competitively to have physical activity in my life, but it grew into a love for the sport and just a love for the water. Swimming will always be a part of my life and routine even after college. With COVID and having all the pools close down for months it really made me open my eyes and realize how much this sport impacts my life, I was going crazy not being able to jump into a pool and just swim back and forth. It also made me realize that since it has been a part of my life for so long, I don't know anything else, I love jumping into the water and just feeling myself glide across the surface. It is something that will stick with me forever, and my love for it has grown from when I started at Hubbard.

Swimmer 3

I have always loved the water. It has given me freedom, purpose, redemption, and a reason to be the best me every day. It has saved me from bad and horrible days a countless number of times and has turned those days into little fragments of light that light of my life as a whole. Swimming has brought me the highest of highs and the lowest of lows. Yet I continue to return to the water, not because it's the only thing I know, but because it's the only thing I want to do. Swimming allows me to let go of everything around me, good or bad, and just be. Be one with the water in a way that I can express my power and enthusiasm in a unique way. While swimming has brought me countless tears, bad practices, the want to just give up and move on I never can because it brings me life in a way nothing else does.

I can't remember a time I wasn't in the water. I have been swimming since before I could walk whether it was just hours of fun with my sister to collecting animal puppets in the kitty

pool I can always remember being at the pool. My earliest memory was bumping up from the kitty pool to the big kids pool the day I turned 7. It's all I talked about for the whole day, I even told the pool desk attendant as I was jumping for joy. But when it came time for me to actually follow through, I froze. This pool was deeper, bigger, scarier, and there was so many more kids and adults' part of the organized chaos that made up junipers family swim time. As soon as I let go and got over my fear everything worked out. I was able to jump off the diving boards, play dolphins and mermaids with my sister, and just enjoy the uncertainty of the freedom but responsibility that came with swimming on my own.

I was a gymnast for 8 years before I became a swimmer. I had done rec league and just summer swimming and when I finally called it quits for gym it was the thing that was waiting for me. I soon learned that swimming was meant for me, and I was good at it. I didn't make my first a time till I was 14 so watching all my peers who had been swimming for 6+ years while I had only been swimming for 2 made me want to work harder and get better so I could be at their level. I am a very organized person who like predicted and planned outcome. Swimming made me get out of the funk. It taught me to do things for me because no one cares, just keep working harder. It also allowed me to separate my personal life and swim life. The pool became my sanctuary and my second home. I would spend more awake hours at the pool then I would at home when I was in school the year before last. Swimming kept me accountable. I would be so upset with myself if I had to miss a practice for some reason. It also opened my eyes to the world of amazing people who swim. I have made lifelong friends through the sport. Good or bad, even when I'm a mental case sometimes, I can always find myself ready to dive in and give 100% no matter the circumstances.

Swimmer 4

My relationship with the water has been a rollercoaster, to say the least. I began to swim lessons at the young age of 5. I was "highly encouraged" to try out the new sport, in other words, was forced into it by my dad. At the time I was a gymnast and took pride in being out on the floor, but when my dad put me in lessons, I was sad to leave behind the sport I was so passionate about. One of my earliest memories in the water was actually my very first race. It took place in the small indoor facility where we practiced. The race was composed of the swimmers, basically, everyone that had completed their lesson program. There were three of us entered in the meet, my brother, a younger girl, and I. We took our marks on the ledge of

the pool and we were to race a 25 as fast as we could. I don't remember the race all too well, however, I remember the feeling of pride once I received my third-place medal. My love for the water and the sport of swimming began to flourish after that race. I fell in love with competing, the awards, the sport. Over the past 13 years in the sport, I would say my relationship with the water has grown immensely. Being in the pool and competing has become a part of me. Not only has competitively swimming made me appreciate the water more and deepen my relationship with it, but it has taught lessons that I have applied to my everyday life.

Swimmer 5

This whole week I tried to reminisce about years ago when I did not know how to swim. But the truth is I can't remember a time when I didn't have some sort of water confidence. For example, I can recall countless times when I went to my learn to swim program before I was 4. I can remember what it looked like, the floaties I used to use and the cat I would always wave hi to on my way inside. To me, my bond with the water has always been somewhat spiritual. I'm the type of person where I am greatly in tune with my body and mostly conscious of how its moving. I take well to criticism cause I know it will make my bond with the water and how I move through it stronger. However, feeling emotions and being in tune with what I'm truly thinking doesn't come easy. I had played every sport and begged my parents to put me on a swim team. I don't know where this passion came from, but it helped me to swim out my emotions especially in high school when the stress had been greatly intensified. I am lucky to have had such a great club coach whose ideologies helped me to understand that doing my best and doing things right was way better than any garbage yardage set or mindlessly sprinting could ever be. As I continued to grow the sets made me mostly love the water even more and although my entire body wanted to cry half the time, the sheer dream of being successful and having that one beautiful race always kept me going. Sometimes I struggle with loving the water and the way I move through it because I have never been the fastest practicer or able to hit my pace like others. Despite this, I enjoy just swimming with me and the water and not really worrying about anything or anyone. This great relationship with the water is a constant thought in my mind and helps me to do things right and better every day. I like when I can flow with the motion of the water and be one with it. Since I started swimming I have always enjoyed holding my breath and just

being at the bottom of the pool hearing all of the splashing and noises. Overall, I truly enjoy swimming because my relationship with the water allows me to connect my body with my head/emotions more and push myself to the max so that I can be successful.

Swimmer 6

I've been swimming for as long as I can remember. I started out when I was around 4 or 5 years old at the local YMCA for swim lessons. A couple years later, I joined my local swim team, and it was so much fun. I was in the little kids' group and every practice was enjoyable, relaxing, and awesome. A few years later I finally moved into the big kids' group because I was fast enough to swim with the other swimmers. I made some good friends on my first swim team that I still keep in touch to this day and talk often with. Swimming was always an escape for me from all the stress in my life. It was relaxing and it taught me to push and motivate myself.

I did a lot of sports when I was little. I did gymnastics, softball, soccer, basketball, and swimming. I had to pick between soccer, basketball, and swimming because I wanted to be on one sport team growing up. I decided to pick swimming because basketball was too much of a physical sport for me because I was tiny compared to the other kids and got pushed around a lot. I liked soccer but I knew I didn't want to do it growing up. I picked swimming because it was something I was actually good at and I'm glad I chose it.

I moved to my second club team when I was around 14 or 15 and that decision was one of the best I've made in my life. I met so many amazing and funny people who I know I'll keep in touch with and chat for the rest of my life. I'm so happy I got to know them, and they made me who I am today.

Now that I think about it, swimming has taught me how to be a hard worker and so I had the same work ethic in school. I always strived to do my best work in and out of the pool.

Swimming is something that I've always loved to do and I'm proud of. Everyone has a special gift that makes them unique, and swimming is that special something that defines me and makes me who I am.

Swimmer 7

I learned to swim in my neighbor's backyard. My swim instructor-- who would one day be my high school biology teacher-- taught me to dive in from the side of the pool, collect plastic rings from the bottom, and, my favorite, float on my back by telling me to find shapes

in the clouds. Her chocolate lab would lie beside the pool and watch as I did my lesson, then run around the yard with me after I was done. I loved going to my neighbors' house. Sure, they were wonderful people, and I am a sucker for dogs, but I eventually discovered the real reason I loved going over there was to get in the water. I loved watching the bubbles float up all around me after I jumped in, like I was in a whole other universe. I loved the sense of calm that washed over me (no pun intended) as I stared up at the sky while floating on my back and listened to the water ripple around me. I loved the sunshine beating down on my pale skin and the smell of sunscreen. I loved these feelings so much that I convinced my parents to let me join the local summer swim team. Here, my love for swimming only grew stronger. Those feelings from before were still present, but now my experience was even more enhanced. I met countless wonderful teammates and coaches. I soon discovered the joy of racing and fell in love with the competitive aspect of the sport, as well. The feeling of accomplishment and happiness I got when touching the wall after a race was exhilarating, a feeling I had never felt before. It electrified me. So, after only two years of rec swimming, I moved to a year-round team, where I spent a large portion of the next 10 years of my life. Those years shaped me into the person that I am today. I learned so many valuable life lessons-- time management, responsibility, the importance of teamwork, and dedication, to name a few-- and slowly became the person I wanted to be. I grew up in the water, watched myself and my peers mature. Many people came and went throughout those years, but many of them are still some of my favorite people in this world. None of those relationships or experiences would have been possible if I hadn't discovered my love for the water, and, ironically, because of those relationships and experiences, my love only grew stronger. When I was younger, I never imagined I would come to love swimming so much that I would eventually strive to swim at the collegiate level. Of course, there were obstacles along the way and times when I wanted to give up, but whenever something discouraged me, I always thought back to my neighbor's backyard. I am thankful each and every day that she offered to give me swim lessons and that I still experience those same feelings when I dive into the water today.

Swimmer 8

I love the water, whether it's a pool, inside or outside, river, pond, lake and everything in between. When I think back on my best and happiest memories that I have they are all either

in water or around water. My relationship with the pool has changed drastically over the years from spending every day during the summer at the neighborhood pool playing different games with my brother but this summer I didn't go to the neighborhood pool once and I don't think this is because my love for the water changed but my focuses changed. Even though I did not frequent the neighborhood pool I still spent most of my days happily at a lake or hiking up the prouder river. I also can't lie and say that I have always loved to swim competitively, I have struggled with being burned out in the but I still never lost my love for swimming, for the smell of chlorine, for the energy you feel when you are on deck for a big meet, for the people, for the endless laughs and smiles. The last year I have had a very different and unique (to say the least) experience with the water and it forced me to step back and truly think about why I choose the sport (the list is long) and at the end of the day It's because I love it and I don't think I have ever had a drive to compete as much as I do now. To be honest I don't think I could even pinpoint one reason why I love the water or why I always have, but as long as I can remember I always loved it.

Swimmer 9

From the moment you are born you are touched by water, whether it's your first bath, first shower, first kiddie pool, first lap pool. When you are a baby, you don't always like it, I cried most of the time and so have my nieces and nephews, it's just a natural part of life. But there was a point and time where I connected with the water. To be completely honest though, when I first started swim lessons I HATED it, I would cry and throw a fit and refuse to get into the water with the instructor. Eventually I ended up in the water and had my lesson, but then a new challenge emerged. Once my lesson was done, I would refuse to get out of the water and throw a fit and my parents just laughed at me. After swim lessons I joined a club team in Mexico, in fact I still have the video of my first race (I must say my technique was flawless). And that started my path of swimming club, I swam for one team for about 2 years then I quit because the air quality was not helping my asthma, so I joined the *Swim Team* with Nacim, and I was on that team for 10 years. Swimming used to just be fun because I was young and could recover fast so I loved racing, I loved diving and feeling my body glide into that water. Swimming became my life, it was hard, but I loved it with all of my heart, of course it was mostly fun and games from when I was like 6-10, but that's what it should be. When I hit 11, I defiantly started to take swim a little more seriously and fully embraced it as

my life when I was 13, I made the commitment and I knew I wanted to compete club, high school and potentially in college. To be straight up, my swimming career has been a rocky road, but I mean who hasn't had a rocky sports career. But there was a time where I doubted my abilities and doubted why I am even swim. I didn't feel like I was a good enough swimmer, and I wasn't Improving, and I was losing some connection with the water. And I love the water and I always have but I didn't understand why I loved the water till my junior year. Junior was not easy, I was taking hard classes and swimming, my mental and physical health were declining, and I wasn't happy. My swimming wasn't improving, and I doubted myself as a swimmer. Because of this voice in the back of my head telling me I wasn't good enough or I wasn't trying hard enough, I tended to have a lot of panic attacks. I'd work myself up and then I couldn't control myself and my panic would be let loose, but what did I do when I had these moments, and what I still do now? I got into the water, I'd take a shower or a bath and somehow these feelings disappeared, and my body relaxed, and I could breathe again. Water itself really saved me and I have this weird connection to it that I can't really explain, like It's not even enough to say I love the water, I am the water. That sounds weird but it's the truth when I'm in the water I become part of it. I love racing and I love swimming as a sport and I'm decent at it too, I love the pressure of anchoring relays, I love the feeling of exploding off the wall and the water. And I love the pool and racing, but My connection grew deeper when I went on my swim trek in Greece. Obviously, I was happy because I was in Greece on the Islands where they filmed Mamma Mia which is one of my favorite movies. But there were two moments on this trip that really changed my life. One was after our morning swim and lunch one of the guides and other swimmers and me decide to play and throw a ball, but also explore around where the boat was parked. The water and I connected again when I was swimming towards the bottom and was looking at a star fish. I was surrounded by crystal clear water; fish were swimming around me as I was just floating on the bottom of the ocean looking around and seeing everything. The second part was on my mom's birthday. For her birthday a few other swimmers, my mom and myself decided to go night swimming. And my goodness was my life changed. It was all fun but then for about 5 minutes, we all floated in complete silence and stared up at the moon. We moved with the waves and listened to the sound of the waves hitting water, I could feel the fish beneath me swimming, I could feel the moon shining on my face, I truly felt like I was part of the water.

And it was magical and since then I have been closer with the water. I have always loved it and I always will, but I just have a new understanding of how water saves me.

Swimmer 10

I forget things really fast so there isn't much that I remember about learning to swim. I was a gymnast for 7 years and started swimming around 10 years old but only because my siblings were already doing it. I wasn't super serious about swimming when I first started so I continued to participate in other sports at the same time. I tried soccer, basketball, softball, karate, and ran track and field. I enjoy all sports and they were fun for a little while, but swimming was the sport that brought my whole family together. My brother and sister had been swimming for quite a while, but when I started swimming both my parents tried it out too.

The most I remember about the beginning of my swimming career was that I was good at kicking underwater. One of my favorite sets we used to do was underwater 25's while wear ankle weights and fins. I'm not sure I would enjoy doing that now, but I'm always up for a challenge. From the day I started swimming there is nothing I would rather be doing. I won't lie there are times I don't want to swim, and some days are harder than others, but swimming has helped me look at life in a completely different way. It has dragged me through some of my worst moments both physically and mentally, but it has also encouraged me to never give up.

I like to view life in a positive way because why waste your energy on anything else, but it has also helped me realize I have so many more people in my life to help me get through the times where I might not be so happy. I know that I can't take everyone's pain away even though I want to. I'm still learning how to express my feelings and not stuffing up all my emotions, however until then, coming to the pool, swimming hard, and being around the people I love most is a great way to deal with the emotions I'm not ready to accept. It's an escape in a way, and I will always be grateful for what it has helped me get through.

Swimmer 11

From the day I was born, I lived a 3-minute walk from the towns YMCA. In this 4 lane, 20-meter pool, with a cut out mushroom area was where my relationship to water began. The years prior to starting school, we basically spent every day there. My parents always have told me stories about how I loved the water. They always say that I would stay a long time

under water and would refuse to get out, but of course I don't remember these times. When my sister joined swimming on the club team, I used to sit at the end of her lane and just watch, this was probably the reason why I started club swimming at the young age of 5. I do not really remember learning physical how to swim, it was always something I just knew how to do. The relationship I have develop with the water has always been a positive one. I have always found that going to swimming was an escape from everything else in my life and just gave me time to think and reflect. If a day was going poorly, the time if the pool allowed for frustration to escape me, math problems to be solved (yes, I do a lot of math thinking while I swim), and time to just think through my day. However, getting older, meant getting more serious about why I was at practice in terms of the sport. The more competitive part of being the water sometimes takes away from that positive relationship. Loving the water and the pool being a happy place to be was lost through many years of unfortunate encounters with coaches who believed themselves to be superior to the wellbeing of humans (This is not directed at you, or any coach in particular, it is just a general statement... do not take offense haha). I have always understood that a coach is there to push you and we are here to get better; however, the love for water should not be diminished in order to get better at a sport. It is unfortunate to say that my relationship with the water has not grown in an increasing manner, but rather in a circular motion. I find the desire to go to the pool, then lose it from poor relationships that have been formed with people highly associated with the pool. The water has always been a second home to me, as there is not a time that I remember not being at it. I always knew I wanted to keep swimming, and keep competing, but I did not enjoy the times where I felt like I was only there because I did not know what life was like without. During this quarantine was the longest I have ever gone without being at the pool. I was desperate to get back in one and happy when the day finally came. The relationship with water will never become a straight increase as conflicts and frustration still will continue as long as I am in the sport of swimming. I will never walk away from the water, just some days I wish it was understood that I just need to hang out underwater and float away with my problems, which is just not the reality of competitive swimming.

Swimmer 12

I've always been around the water my whole life. I've always grown up around it and being outdoors a lot, but water has made the most impact on me through the sport of swimming. My mom worked at a YMCA as a water aerobics instructor so I would go to the pool with her when I was 5 and I would splash around the water with other kids. My first memory in the water is just bobbing up and down because I loved the feeling of it. From there, I joined a year-round team when I was 6 at *Swim Club* and I don't remember the swimming part of it, but I remember my friends. It's funny because I still stay in touch with those friends from when I was 5 and 6. Swimming seems to create deeper bonds. I moved after a year and a half and joined a club team in the school year and a summer league in the summer. I was a fast little kid and I just loved winning and the attention that it gave. Even from a young age though, I just adored fly sets and the feeling of being so smooth with it in the water. As I grew up, this remained the same mostly. If I ever felt that defeated in the water, I could always resort back to my butterfly which always stayed pretty steady. In high school, my club coach was pretty hard on me and my relationship with swim was fairly negative for a while because of the negative attitude and the grueling work ethics she had. The people around me and my friendships with them got us through it though. In my everyday life, it is rare when I don't have my phone around me and swim is also an outlet from that. It just feels nice to not have it around and not have the desire to check it. Overall, I would say that I swim because I love the feeling of fly, and I love my relationships with the people around me. It has changed in some ways, but ultimately it really has stayed the same. It always just comes down to the feelings I get when I swim and how relieving it is.

Swimmer 13

My relationship with water started long before I was born, with my mom. She swam from the moment she could walk all the way to her collegiate career. It was her way of escaping her, away from her messy home life and stressful school experience. It gave her confidence and made her feel like she was making something of herself. Little did she know that passion and dedication would transpire to her daughter years later. When I first started swimming, I was 4 years old. I remember my mom took me to, what in the future would be my high school, dropped me off with complete stranger teenagers and said, "have fun"! I was mortified. At the time I was extremely shy with a speech impediment and some major focusing issues, so

for my mother to just leave me at some random pool, alone, was like a betrayal. However, the more I went, the more I began to really enjoy myself at these swimming lessons and soon I was begging my mom to put me in our summer league team, then soon after, club swim. Swimming attracted me, not just because I hate to run and jump around, but because the feeling it gave me. The feeling of knowing you're getting better and knowing that you get to be around other people who are just like you, it was intoxicating. Now I'm not going to sit here and say I've had the world's best swimming experience, with no bumps in the road at all, because that would be a straight up lie. There have been MANY times where quitting seemed like the only option, but yet I'm still here. Why? Because the love never died. Just like you get into fights with your family, friends, etc., I got into fights with swimming. But I grew up. I realized that I'm not the fastest out there but that doesn't mean I'm horrible myself. I realized that I'm not going to be a pro swimmer and that's completely ok. We're all at different places in life. The most important thing is to never forget that feeling

Swimmer 14

I would describe my relationship with the water as whole. When I am in the water, I feel content, happy, and simply whole. It took me awhile to find that one drive I really have, I have never been an accelerated student (been okay but never great), never got my drive off another sport or anything. However, the one thing I could always find myself drawn back to is swimming. When I'm in the water I can clear my mind of absolutely anything and everything going on outside the water and I love it. Swimming to me is so unique because for once I don't have to stress about for instance, a homework assignment. I can come to practice with a clear and empty mind and just roll with whatever the practice is, and I love that for myself. Sure, when it comes down to racing, I have my own personal struggles with that (getting in my head too much) but really remembering my roots and why I love this sport so much helps bring me back down. My relationship with swimming has been rocky at sometimes, that transition period from a girl to a woman is hard when it comes to swimming. Coming to the realization that the older you get the less you're going to start dropping time at every single solitary meet. Then of course you go through the high school phase of "hanging out with my friends is more fun than swim practice" or "what's after this? Why am I in the water for 20 hours a week to then just be done one day and hang up the suit". Yes those thoughts run through my mind but I feel as if that is only normal and to really sit back and

reflect on what I'm doing with my life and how hard I've worked to get here reminds me that I'm swimming and doing this because I want to, I like the way it makes me feel, I like to race, I like to train, and I love the way I can clear my mind and just simply swim.

Swimmer 15

My relationship with the water is a roller coaster. My mom was the person who introduced me to swimming. She wanted me to learn how to swim just so I can save myself if I'm in any drowning situations. It's difficult to remember every moment that happened with my first encounter with the water, but I do remember that it happened at our local YMCA and started with me disliking the water because of the cold temperature.

Every week my mom would take me to the YMCA at least three times a week for lessons. There are other kids in the same sessions as me, which I wasn't comfortable with because I wasn't an introvert. As I went to the lessons, I became closer to the kids in my group and had fun with my instructor as well. Later on, as I kept swimming, my mom signed me up for club swimming, which was a continuation of my dislike for swimming. I was only exposed to swimming in a way of seeing it as a recreational activity where all you need to do is splash around and float, occasionally using water guns and floaties. My mother exposed me to swimming as in "racing". The first club practice was difficult. During the lessons, I did learn how to swim all strokes, however, I didn't learn how to control my speed. Everybody in the first club practice must be taking their time warming up while I sprinted the first 200 free and almost passed out. Later on, as I keep training, my speed was under control. Plus, I had some friends in my elementary school who swam at the same club with me.

As high school and college came around, swimming is considered a stress reliever for me. It helped me cope with my problems and helped me gain a stronger relationship with my teammates.

In short, the water helped me make relationships with friends and peers, plus it helped shaped me as a person. In addition, it helped me from having mental breakdowns in life.

Swimmer 16

The first time I touched water was when bathing as a little kid. Let me just tell you, I hated it. There was something about the water touching my skin, forcing me to close my eyes, and my hair being soaking wet that me so angry. But then I entered our backyard pool for the first time. I was instantly in love. The water was the perfect mixture of cool and warm that felt so

good on my skin. It was a saltwater pool so I could open my eyes underwater whenever I wanted to, and I loved watching my wet hair float around the water like a mermaid. I wasn't alone in these memories that led to my love of swimming, they always included my dad. Every time I went for a swim or a mess around in my backyard pool, my dad was always there. He taught me how to float. He taught me how to kick. But most importantly, he taught me how to love the water and have fun. We would end up in that tiny, five-and-a-half-foot deep pool for hours on end. He would flip me in the air from the shallow end to the deep end like I was a rag doll. Because of him and that backyard saltwater pool, my love of the water and swimming was born. I don't do flips in the air, open my eyes underwater, or let my hair flow through the now chlorine water, but my bond with swimming has grown so much. I like to think that every time I get in the pool, it is a new beginning for this 18-year-old, 5'9 girl, but that could never change the start of it all for the tiny kid in her backyard pool. Don't be fooled though, that feeling towards baths is still there!

Swimmer 17

My first memory of swimming I was in my neighborhood pool near the house my family and I lived in with my grandparents. I was in the water laying on my back as a family friend of ours repeated "Airplane, Chicken, Soldier. Airplane, Chicken, Soldier." I had asked my grandma about this memory, and it turns out I was 3 years old at the time. Flash forward to 6 years later I was in my home pool at a pre swim team practice called *Swim Club*. I remember loving going penguin club, I was the fastest in my lane and I had a natural affinity towards the water. I loved the way the bubbles sounded as I exhaled and what the bottom of the pool looked like through my Costco brand goggles. I remember a scary man once came and asked me if I planned on doing penguin club again, when I replied, he told me "No, you're going to do swim team" and went to scout out my parents. I was nine when I first joined the swim team, I cried on my first day of practice and I remember it being hard. 3 years later when I finally chose swimming over soccer, I chose swimming because it was hard. I always think that sounds stupid and so cocky, but even though I was good at soccer, it was never all on me. I always had someone to blame if things went wrong but with swimming it was simple, and I loved it. I loved the way I could move my way through the water and the way it felt to lay on the bottom, and I loved going to practice to race myself and my teammates. When I was 13, I moved up into the high school group, I remember how nervous I was, at the time I

had no idea why I was nervous now I know I was scared to fail. Once I got into the high school group, I started to have a hard time breathing. I couldn't understand why I was having such a hard time, I was just as fast as everyone else, but they all seemed to be fine. I thought that was how everyone was so I would swim until I had black dots in my vision and would have to get out gasping and wheezing for air. Because of this, my anxiety around swimming became worse, I would puke every day before practice and most days would have to get out early because I couldn't breathe and would have panic attacks, making it worse. I've struggled with my breathing my entire high school career, I found out that I have VCD (vocal cord dysfunction) and asthma, which allowed me to find some help. I no longer puke before practice, and I almost never have to get out anymore, but I still have anxiety surrounding swimming. I absolutely love what I do but there is a part of me that hates it.

Swimmer 18

I don't completely remember actually learning to swim, but when I was four years old, I joined the swim team my sister was on. Being the younger sister, I always wanted to do everything that my sister did. I would get in the water and just try to copy whatever she did. I have always been a competitive person, especially with my sister which has helped me work hard to become the swimmer I am today. As I've grown up as a swimmer my relationship with the sport has had many ups and downs including coaching changes and team changes. I believe I work hard at practice, and it can be hard when I feel like it doesn't pay off. But now that I am a Vandal my love for swimming has improved so much. I swim because the pool is my happy place, and I can always clear my mind of any stress or if I'm having a bad day by just putting my head down and swimming.

Swimmer 19

While trying to remember the first memory that I can think back to, it remains in the water. I was about three years old snorkeling in Mexico with my dad. Yes, that may seem risky to have a 3year old kicking along in the ocean, but I guess it was a normal thing for my family. I remember trying to chase the minnows that swam by me. One of the fish that swam by was a little bigger than a minnow, it was a barracuda... so I tried to chase it like all the others. I remember a pull on my leg from my dad, jolting me back while he calmly says, "maybe not that one". I've always loved the water. When we moved to Missouri when I was three, we

had a large pool in the backyard which we loved. I was three, *Brother* was five, and *Sister* was seven. This meant that they were old enough to join the summer league swim team, Manchester, that had an age cutoff at five. Because I was the youngest, I obviously wanted to join so my mom made me a deal. If I could swim all the way across the pool without needing any help, I could join the swim team. Next week I was in the water with my siblings. I can remember those Manchester days vividly, the 90s music playing on the speakers, kids splashing left and right, I was named ladybug by the coach who proceeded to call me that until I moved away in high school. I loved it. Being there was not exercise. It was not to impress anyone or prove myself. It was harmless and playful. I have had a long relationship with the sport, as most of us do. In high school the fun started to fade, and it became a chore. I tried to stop swimming, my parents being extremely supportive every time. The only requirement was to find a hobby to keep myself busy. I kind of appreciate that because I got some new interests, such as photography. I am not sure what it was, could be *COACH* not accepting the fact that I did not want to swim, but I kept coming back eventually. I've come to realize that it is when I can have fun either with what I am doing or the people that I am with who make it worth it. I did not start swimming when I was three years old to just improve my times or get a nice start. I did it to make endless memories and connections that I will have forever. Those goals have not seemed to change.

Swimmer 20

My dad is a coach, and my mom was an Olympic swimmer, so naturally I was put in to the water at an age so young I genuinely can't remember my first experience. I know it started at my grandparent's condo community pool. There was a hot tub there so every time my parents went, I would go and play in what we called the "cold pool," even though it really wasn't cold I was just very small. I have many vague memories of switching between the hot tub and the cold pool and I would often convince one of my parents to come with me so they could throw me in the deep end while I was tucked in a ball. Even though I don't remember much from this time in my life, my parents loved to tell me a story about how when I was just around 3 maybe 4 years old, I would run over to the deep end by myself and dive in. They would say that people would freak out about this, but to my parents it was not a scary thing at all. It was a huge part of my life from very early on. I started to race in summer league when I was just 5, but for a lot of my young years it was not serious beyond those few races where I prided

myself with ribbons. It was always about the snacks that would get put out at practice or the wonder if we would get to go off the diving board at the end or if it was someone's birthday would they bring a treat. However, the actual getting in the water part of practice was a bit of a drag because I would always get so cold because of how small I was. Up until I was about 11, I had tried many other sports because there was a community center close walking distance to my house, so my mom loved to put me in different courses. But even then, throughout those years I always came back to swimming. My relationship with swimming really changed when I got to high school and swam under a coach that (although she would disagree) I credit a lot of my growth in the sport to. She knew my mom and even swam against her long before me, so I remember her being very excited to have me around. During my sophomore year is when I qualified for a meet called CCS which was very exciting for me. At that meet I went way faster than any of us expected and from then I was hooked. It made me feel good about myself. And when I struggled with mental health during my junior year swimming was always there for me. It was an outlet that made me who I was. And it was a place that I had fun working hard with my teammates and building a relationship with my coach *Name* that I learned too much from. Which leads us to my freshman year in college. Without getting too much into the details this was a very tough year, but I learned so much. It was a bad experience plain and simple. I lost a lot of love for the sport which was extremely hard to deal with because I equated a lot of myself to swimming. And I had no idea who I was without it. On a few occasions I cried in the locker rooms because I was so upset that swimming wasn't what it used to be for me anymore. But at my conference meet I realized that I did still love the sport just not where I was at. A lot of the issues I was facing were completely out of my control and it wasn't my fault. I remember at this meet what I love about the sport. I love being a part of a team, I love how rewarding it is after working so hard, and I love what it contributed to me as a person. I made some friends that I will probably have for the rest of my life, and I realized that swimming is not me and I love who I am outside of the sport. I learned what it means to be a good teammate and a good friend to even myself. I am so happy to be getting a second chance to do what I love and am excited to be able to apply my experiences to create a great season.

Swimmer 21

I began to swim on a swim team around 5-6. But that's not when I started to love swimming or the water. It all started when I was around 4 years old, and I fell into the pool. This was around the time when I was starting swim lessons and learning the basics of swimming like blowing bubbles, floating, kicking, etc. Of course, I was terrified when I fell in and my brother who was only 2 years older than me had to save me with a rake... My parents then realized they needed to be more serious about the swim lessons because I could not stop being around the water/ was always curious, which caused me to fall in. My journey with being around water was a roller coaster. I loved the water growing up but once my parents had me join the swim team, I was terrified, and I hated it. I had many temper tantrums before practice which was funny because after practice, I had a huge smile on my face. It took many years for me to not throw temper tantrums and at probably around 7-8 years old I fell in love with swimming and the water. I was a good swimmer as a kid I'm not going to lie. I got lots of first place ribbons, I always got 2nd place high point at our champs meet (which I was not too happy at because I wanted first place), and always got high point on the team. I think that was when I realized that I wanted to continue my journey with swimming. My coach pushed me in practice and always put me with the boys to make it more competitive and "fun". I was/ am still extremely competitive, and I am grateful for that. I would not be who I am or where I am today without my competitiveness and the swimmers who push me every day in practice. I look back at my journey and think to myself If I didn't end up falling in love with swimming, what would I be doing today?

Swimmer 22

I really don't remember anything before I was in middle school so I can't really say what my life before swimming was like. I know I did water babies and from the moment I was first in the pool my parents said I was drawn to it. I continued to swim throughout the rest of my life. I ended up playing lots of sports, and one by one they dropped off my schedule to make time for swimming. Track, basketball, soccer, and biking could not break my relationship with the water.

Swimming as always been there for me. No matter how chaotic or insane life got, swimming was always there (except for when COVID and everything closed). Not having the

opportunity to swim over the summertime, I realized how much I missed the sport, along with all of my teammates.

Although swimming has been there for me every day, I've sacrificed so much to swim, it's an expensive sport so instead of getting a college fund, my parents put that money to swim, I also put social life and non-swim friends on hold, as well as school work, just so I could continue to excel and grow doing my sport. I also struggle to find motivation sometimes. It gets hard and stressful and that can really put a damper on how I view the sport at times. Last year particularly I struggled with keeping my love for the sport first and my times second. After not swimming for 7 months, I am so glad I didn't quit and that I get to be back in Moscow doing the sport I love.

When I am in the water, I am either feeling my best... or my worst. When I am feeling my best, I feel athletic and like I can do anything and tackle any challenge put in front of me. But when I am not doing good, or not feeling like I am holding water it's a completely different story. I get in my head and freak myself out and then that affects the rest of my day, sometimes can last up to a couple weeks if I can't find my rhythm again.

In short, swimming has been my whole life and I can't remember any time before I was swimming. It's also more mentally hard than physically because it's either a really good high, or the worst low you could think of, and not really an in between. But I love it and will continue to try and remember how much I love it even when times get really tough.

Swimmer 23

No response

Swimmer 24

Whenever I get the chance to "compete" or race whether it be in practice or at a meet it brings me joy because it gives me a rush of adrenaline that is unexplainable, but I will try my best. When I am able to get past my nerves and truly race not thinking about the outcome I get a rush of excitement but also calm at the same time, I can feel the water and it flowing through my hands and past my body but also at the same time am not paying attention to it, I am focused but zoned out at the same time. I don't know it's a weird experience that is hard to explain but feels amazing. Yes, there were a few times where I experienced this, and I haven't felt like that in a long time. I am really enjoying swimming again and getting back to the point of how I was when I was younger. This weekend has made me excited to swim

again and meant the world to me, not only did both Mark and Katie help a ton with starting to get over my performance anxiety but the team is so supportive, and I loved being weird and getting them to laugh, it made me laugh. I was ready to give up competition and to either just swim for myself or to give it up all together at the start of quarantine. However, I gave Mark and this team a chance, and I am glad I did. I am incredibly grateful to be a part of the team and swim, everyone including the coaches has aided in my journey to loving swimming again and I do not know where I would be if I wasn't here with them being a part of something bigger than me.

Swimmer 25

I never expected to go back and run through my life as a swimmer. In all honesty, my swim career and the way I perceived being a swimmer was completely ruined by my past coach. It was truly hard for me to try and remember exactly when I went from someone who swims, to an actual swimmer. The reason it was so difficult was that I completely repressed all my memories from ages 12-15. I was verbally, mentally and physically abused by my past coach. He would constantly call me fat or a hippo because, in his eyes, I was 'overweight'. At 14, I weighed 140 pounds of pure muscle. I was weight lifting every other day, and I became a 5'4 muscle ball. He would call me out for being slow, for holding up the group, for just being myself. I described myself as a soulless shell, no emotion, no desire. I didn't have a goal at that time. I was not swimming for myself, I was not swimming for my family, I was not swimming for my team nor for my coach. I was swimming because I felt forced. Because that was the only way of life I knew. At 14 I was diagnosed with depression. I went to therapy, but I could never open up because I always felt like my coach was listening to me somehow. If I said one bad thing about him, I would end up dead. I was practically a robot. I had the same routine, week by week. I became so depressed I lost all my school friends. I was the youngest in my group by 2 years, and no one wanted to be friends with the girl who could not do anything right. For 4 years straight, I cried myself to sleep every night. I got night terrors of going to practice the next day. I would wake up in a pool of sweat and tears every morning. I would pull myself together and get going on my day. The point of this whole backstory is that I never truly felt like a swimmer. I was always swimming for some sort of status. If I met a certain qualifying standard, or if I medaled at a national meet, maybe my coach would cut me some slack for a week. Now don't get me wrong, all that is super

cool, but I never felt satisfied with how I swam, because my coach was NEVER satisfied with me. The only reason I returned to the water each day was that I was forced to. Forced by myself and forced by my coach. When I switched clubs, I still never found that sense of being a swimmer. I definitely was a whole lot happier when I switched, but I still swam because I felt forced by myself. But this all changed last year. My first phone call with Mark changed my life. I'm not exaggerating either. The minute I got off the phone with Mark I felt valued. It was such an odd feeling. No one has ever truly valued me as a swimmer. It was also a sense of relief. All my hard work and dedication actually paid off. I remembered calling my mom right after I got off the phone with Mark and telling her that this is the school I want to go to, not just because it has a solid swim team, but because they want me on the team. I have never been wanted on any team. I became a swimmer after I got off the phone with Mark. Everything prior to that, I was just someone who paddles around in the water. Ever since that call, my perspective on the sport and how I viewed myself changed. I instantly felt happier, the happiest I had been in a LONG time. Because of this experience, I can proudly call myself a swimmer.

Week 2: Becoming a Swimmer

Reflection Prompt:

During this past week we spent a good amount of time talking about what it means to “be” a swimmer. On Monday your coach talked to you about when he decided he would become a coach as he sat and watched the sea lions swim at the National Zoo in Washington DC. We also read from the book *Body and Soul* which described how Lois Wacquant “became” a boxer. On Friday you had some time to listen to your teammates talk about the culture and being a swimmer. All of these stories began with a choice then transitioned into something more intimate and part of the person’s *being*.

Why do you choose to return to the water day after day, week after week? Describe what being a swimmer means to you and how a day in the water can be unique and different.

Swimmer 1

I feel like my whole life I have been a swimmer because of my connection and love for the water. I grew up in Bozeman Mt. for a couple years so there definitely wasn't very much water but my family is very outdoor oriented so we would go skiing, camping, and everything outside. After about four years of living in Bozeman, my family made the move

to Boise where I started doing swim lessons and swim team. When I first started swimming, my dad left my family so swimming was a place for me to escape my issues at home. When I came to swim practice, I felt like a new person because no one knew what I was going through at home, and I could be my fun and happy self when swimming. My grandparents also live in Boise and helped tremendously during this time and others and my grandma always drove me to swim practice and packed me the best snacks, haha. From my grandma taking me to practice, we became best friends and were practically inseparable. She is always so positive and motivates me to do my best and to always have a smile on my face even during tough times. Her influence on me before swim practice has definitely made me the swimmer I am today because I mostly associate swimming with a positive attitude. Although, I may not ALWAYS be the most excited to swim every day, I always know in the back of my head why I swim.

Swimmer 2

This is topic makes me think a lot, I can't pinpoint the time when I knew I was a swimmer, but I just knew it was something that I loved even during the hard times. The water has always been a place for me to let go which is something that I talked about in my last journal, but it was also a place for me to think. Swimming gets me out of my own head and lets my mind clear of all the issues outside of the pool, I think about what makes me happy and good things that happened in the day instead of me stressing over assignments or worrying about little aspects of my life. I overthink a lot during the day and being in the water is an escape from that.

To me being a swimmer is a way of life, there are not a lot of people outside the pool who can relate to your experiences in the water. This sport is much different than every other sport. A lot of my friends who are athletes sometimes think I'm crazy because of the number of hours I train, and that swimming is a year-round sport. Swimming isn't something that you can just stop for a couple of months, you have to be dedicated to it. That is what I love about the sport, it becomes a part of your life. Over quarantine when all of the pools were closed it really made me think about the sport; I have missed my friends birthday parties because I have a meet, I have missed family functions because I have a meet or practice, I didn't go out with my friends during the week because I had to get up early for morning practice. I have made a lot of decisions in my life that revolve around the sport, and it seems insane to me.

But I have realized that I made that choice because the water is where I needed to be physically and mentally. It soothes my mind and makes me feel whole. On days when I don't swim, I feel like I have done nothing; I need to be in the water for my day to be complete. Even if I have a good practice or a bad practice, I know that this is where I need to be. I think the quarantine has really made me realize that I am a swimmer and made me appreciate the time that I am in the water. Being in the water will always be a part of my life in one way or another, it would be really hard for me to completely step away from it.

Swimmer 3

The day I became a swimmer, or better yet the week I became a swimmer was probably one of the most mentally taxing and physically draining times in my life I will never forget. I can still remember almost every feeling and how long it took me to pull myself out of the whole I had dug for myself mentally. But I couldn't be happier that I stayed with swimming for the rest of my high school and now my college career.

I haven't been swimming competitively for anywhere near some of the other girls on my club, granted I didn't get my first state time till I was just turning 14. Which puts me behind the curve as a swimmer hoping to make their mark. But I have always had a drive to win or succeed in any way possible. Sometimes it was just goals and sometimes I wanted to be the best. I have the mindset of, do something to your best ability and make it worth it or don't do it at all because there's no use in only giving 50% and expecting results. So, my story begins as a 15-year-old 9th grader who had gotten herself into a mess like no other. I had just finished out high school swimming and planning to go to senior age group zones and make finals etc. Well at high school districts I swam two of my best races ever and make not one but two senior sectional cuts and since I had turned 15 and could no longer go to age group sectionals if I had got a senior sectional cut. This was huge and terrifying all at the same time. It had been my goal all year, but I couldn't shake the feeling that something was wrong.

Three weeks of hard training go by, and nothing feels right, I can barely finish a practice, I'm not on pace, and I start to continuously doubt myself more and more. Finally, the time comes to travel to Texas for the four corners senior sections meet. The water so cold but it felt like syrup. The air quality so bad some teams were wearing surgical masks and you had to sit outside between races. But the facility one of the most jaw dropping pools I've ever been to.

It had four pools almost mocking federal way in a way. Two competition, two warmup/warmdown. The lane lines red and so new they still had a crispness about them. We had gotten there a couple days early in order to feel out the pool and get to know the facility and how everything worked. This was my first big meet ever. Swimming beforehand had just been more of a hobby rather than a lifestyle and that was about to change.

My meet was horrible. I added in every event, achieved none of my goals, disappointed myself, cried, took my disappointment out on my mom, and the list goes on. I had had a panic attack in my two fly, my best event, that took me three years to finally get past. This meet made me second guess myself and my coach. It was probably the worst I had felt as an athlete in my whole life.

But something happened in that week. I went from being more of a hobby swimmer to committing my every ounce of strength and power to this sport. It was all I could talk about from then on. There was an Olympian that was swimming at that meet, and I got to watch her Destroy her competition every time she stepped up on that block. All I could think to myself was I want to do that; I want to be that. That's how now I learned my mindset changed, in that horrible week I made up my mind that I needed to dedicate myself to the sport and become one with the water and not fight the water. That was my turning point because I never want to go back to that spot physically or mentally, but it was my jumping off point. If I was going to get better, I needed to learn and apply what I saw, listened, and learned in that cram packed building in Dallas Texas.

Swimmer 4

No response

Swimmer 5

I've been going back to the water ever since I can remember. There's a lot of reasons why I choose to go back. First of all, I think a major component for me is that I love the community that surrounds the water. I've made some of the closest friends in the world through the water. They are always there to support me and encourage me to be a better person. I can 100% say that I wouldn't still be swimming today if it wasn't for the friends that motivate me to be at practice and to try my best.

Walking through the pool doors is like clockwork. I know the smell, sight, and feeling I have when I walk through the doors and onto the pool deck. I see familiar faces as I walk across

the pool. I love to sit down by the blocks and listen to other people's conversations to see how their day was or what they've been up to. Being in the water is very relaxing when you first dive in. And cold. The water is very, very cold at first. But after a while, it starts to warm up a bit. I always see swimmers while I'm taking a breath and flipping on the wall. That's something unique that only swimmers can say.

Being a swimmer takes a lot of dedication and perseverance. It's one of the hardest sports out there and you have to be tough to do it. I think swimming has taught me how to have grit and to keep trying when things don't go the way you planned. Without swimming, I know I would be a different person with a different outlook on life. This sport has given me friends, a new viewpoint on life, and qualities that are developed through swimming. I don't know who I would be or what I would be doing in this moment if I wasn't a swimmer. (I would probably just be at home sitting on the couch eating potato chips).

Swimmer 6

Swimming is so much more than a workout for me. While this is of course a benefit, this sport provides me with so much more. It provides an opportunity for me to escape the real world and let my mind wander. Whenever I'm feeling stressed or anxious, typically jumping in the pool puts my mind at ease, or at least distracts me from my other worries. It provides me with a goal to work towards. I am a very type-A individual: I like to know what my future will look like and be on a schedule. And while it is difficult to predict exactly what will happen in a given practice or race, I take comfort in knowing that I come to practice each day with a goal in mind that I can accomplish. This goal can be big or small. Some days, I want to focus on my backstroke technique. Other days, I'm focused on maintaining a certain pace during fast 50s. Sometimes my goal will be very simple, like being mindful of my body position in the water during each set. Whatever my focus is that day, it is nice to know that I am being productive with my time in the water and shaping myself into a better swimmer and overall person. Even if I don't necessarily swim faster at each and every meet--which is obviously still one big goal of the sport--, I try to remind myself that every day I accomplish something in the water, and it makes me feel good about myself. And while some people get tired of the repetition of coming to practice each day, having that structure in my life keeps me grounded and gives me something to look forward to. Though each day is unique based off of how sore or tired I am and not every practice is stellar, having that sense of

normalcy and knowing that I am working towards something bigger than just that one practice keeps me coming back. When people find out I'm a competitive swimmer--which is pretty easy to do, since my broad shoulders and permanent chlorine scent follow me everywhere I go--they often ask me what stroke I swim or what my best times are. But to me, being a swimmer is so much more than numbers recorded on a pace clock or a piece of paper. In my own experience, becoming a swimmer had mostly to do with the positive feelings I felt after completing a practice or cheering on a teammate during their race. Joy, accomplishment, relief, power, and strength are just some of the many positive emotions I experience while in the water. I swim because it makes me feel good, and even though there are bad days mixed in, I keep coming back to the pool because my love for it greatly outweighs any negative experiences I have had there. Though swimming does not define who I am, it is a big part of myself that I know will always be with me, even when my time in the pool is up some day.

Swimmer 7

I think that the last two weeks have really shown me why I choose to return to the week after week after week. On top of the reasons, I touched on last week about loving swimming I have also realized that swimming is my main stress reliever. It gives me a chance to clear my head, I can step on the pool deck and my anxieties and stress decreases. When I start swimming the black line on the bottom of the pool has a memorizing effect and deepens the effect even more further clearing my head. With the world shutting down and my injury I have discovered even more how much swimming is a part of who I am, and without it a small part of me felt lost or missing. I also learned the difference between the pool and swimming in a lake/pond, while swimming again in a lake made me feel more like myself and also decreased my stress it didn't have the same effect as the pool. I was missing the smell of chlorine, the black line, and the sounds that you normally hear on the pool deck. But in my mind most important it was missing the people our team had been split into fourths and we were divided, and the most important aspect was missing, the laughter. So, in short, I swim week after week after week because I love the sport, it relives my stress, and once again I love the people who have become my family.

Swimmer 8

I started swimming on a club team when I was 4 years old, and I'm still swimming now. But there was a point where I became a true swimmer. From about 4-10, I was a serious swimmer for that age, but it was pretty low pressure, and it was just me and the water and the race. I wasn't thinking about getting certain times, I would just race. But as I got older, that meant my body started to change and I was getting bigger. My muscles were growing, and I was getting taller, so ultimately swimming was getting harder. I couldn't recover as fast as I could before, I got sore, and I didn't have the energy of my 8-year self. And becoming older meant more pressure, I had to reach certain cuts, get faster times, go to higher meets, think about my future swimming career. I know there are many elite teams all over the country and world, but in Oregon, my team was one of the top teams and that was just pressure itself, because I wanted to uphold the team's name and my old coach. So, to be completely honest, there was a time where I was like, why am I swimming? What is the point of swimming? Like why am I here? It was honestly a horrible feeling, feeling so lost and confused and questioning why am I swimming. All during this time I didn't realize that every time I got an anxiety attack, or was stressed or angry, my first instinct was to get in the water, whether it was swimming or showering. I didn't realize how I changed when I was in the water how I was relaxed, and how my body urged to race and feel my pulse race. I actually wrote my college application about this, but I wrote about this fog, a fog that clouded my vision and surrounded me with numbness and I found no joy, in school or swimming anymore. It was when I exited this fog, when I became a swimmer, because I missed the safety and feeling of water, I forgot how water saved me so many times, and I don't think I'll ever forget that feeling. I mean even going through quarantine, I became a swimmer again when I had my first practice as a vandal. I went 7 months of no practice, just some open water swimming and being tied to a tree. That made me a stronger person and a better swimmer, but as soon as we started practicing, I felt ready, I am ready to train hard, I'm ready to be sore, and I am ready to race, I have never had such a strange urge to race and compete. I personally don't believe you just have one moment of becoming a swimmer, because I think everyone goes through phases of doubt and hardship. I think you have multiple moments of becoming a swimmer. We choose to swim, we chose this lifestyle, and it sucks sometimes, but in the end

we all come out happy and loving our sport. Every time we have a down, we have an up that shows us why we are swimmers.

Swimmer 9

I'm not going to lie I haven't really thought about the reasons as to why I come back to the pool every day. For me, it has always seemed more like a job. It helps pay for my school and my parents encouraged me not to get a job because that's what they considered swim to be. However, when I joined this team, I found a different reason to wake up and swim every day. Don't get me wrong I've always loved to be in the water and when we were quarantined for so long, I wish I had been, but I also just really wanted to be with my friends. Like I said last week, my whole family swims and I started, and hopefully will end, my swimming career with my sister. My sister is my best friend and we have always been super close, but swimming is really the only thing we have in common. We were on 3 different club teams together and one of us always struggled making friends, but we had each other so it didn't really matter. We also had our good share of bad coaches/coaching, but again, we had each other so it didn't matter how we were treated. Until I came to this team, I didn't know what a good coach was or what it truly means to love your sport. I did what I needed to do to get to where I am, and I am so glad I did because I couldn't have asked for a better outcome. I went 18 years without the support of a great team and coach, and it's only been a year and I can't even imagine what my life looked like before.

Swimmer 10

There hasn't been a time in my life where I was not part of a swim team. At the young age of 5, I swam my first meet. I can remember that day with much detail and I find too funny to think that my warmup was just a short 4 lengths of the pool. I was always the smallest and youngest in the group growing up and the day of that meet, my dad came down onto the deck and asked for my coach to get me out of the warmup as the other people in my lane were three times the size as me. From that moment in the warmup, I have been a swimmer. I was a swimmer in this moment because I did not want to get out of the pool, no matter how scared I was about all the big people running me over. Not much has changed since this young age. I am the type of person who likes order, and I liked it back then as well. I had specific deck clothes and a specific towel. Everything had to be the same each time in order for me to feel comfortable and I feel like I am very much the same now. I like to know what I

am getting into and swimming, although different and unique each day, it is something I know will be consisted.

I choose to be in the water day after day, and week after week because I do not know a world without. I do not know what it is like to not be in a constant state of sogginess. As you put on clothes for the day after morning practice, those pants don't slide on just right as they stick to your still damp legs. Throughout the day, your hair lies in a nice pile of wet mess at top your head and doesn't fully dry before you are putting that cap back on for PM practice. And when you fall asleep at night, that hair is still in a wet, messy, bun because there is no reason to tackle it as you are just going to back in the water the next morning. The endless cycle of being soggy, is what makes you go back. I continue to swim because of all the people around me. This being my fourth team, means I have met many people and been part of many families. Swimming has given me the opportunity to grow so much as a person because of the number of people who have been around me during my time at the pool. Although, there are moments and people I would like to forget, these negative experiences are what makes me the person I am today. Not many people can say they left home at the age of 17 to live with a different family. And even fewer people can say within those next 2 years, they have created family bonds with 4 different ones (including my actual one). I can say I have a "fake" family and know that those people love me like their real child all because I am a swimmer.

Swimmer 11

I choose to return to the water day after day because of a lot of the same reasons as last week's journal. The friendships that surround me are a big reason in itself. They make the tough sets doable just knowing my buddies are doing the same exact set. I also go back to the water for not only the working out aspect, but the way swimming makes me feel. The moment that I realized that I was a swimmer was in rec league when I was 8. I would swim year-round during the school year and then do rec league in the summer. There was one meet against Grass Valley where I was swimming my rival (and best friend) *Name* and I didn't really want to embrace that I was any good or that people were watching me. I was eating otter pops and playing cards and almost missed my race, but I ran up and got there just in time. I dove in and we were side by side, but I managed to out touch her by a hair. Everyone around us were cheering, and that moment just made me realize that we were different than

them. We embraced practice and ultimately, we loved racing. We spent the hours and the time to get where we were. It made me realize that this could be something more. I like that it gives me something to be proud of and something to feel accomplished about. Being a swimmer means dedication and hard work to me. It means that I have to think about the way I live my life and how that would affect my teammates/ my swimming. A day in the water can be unique and different by focusing on small goals each day. Or the conversations that are constantly changing in the water. Sometimes it changes from feeling good in the water to not feeling good.

Swimmer 12

I choose to return to the water because of my connect that I had with the people involved. I formed relationships with many people over the course of my almost 15-year journey. Whether it be the connection between me and my mom in the previous entry or with the coaches and friends, the bonds that swimming has given me is something extraordinary. Swimming means to me not being in the water per say but that's pretty good, but the people around me in the pool. I am a people person, so if the team doesn't have THAT connection, what am I doing here. A day in the water can be unique and different depending on the atmosphere of my surroundings.

Swimmer 13

When I became a swimmer, I was 5 years old, I previously had been doing gymnastics but my parents, both working full time with three kids (my brother already swimming at the time) said "it's a one stop shop you're going to the pool." Me, being 5, was just going with the flow. Thinking back to what my mom said though I wouldn't have had it any other way. I'm so happy she made me start swimming because here I am, swimming for the University of Idaho. Previously in journal entry one, I went in depth of "why I swim and my relationship with the water" This ultimately is why I still swim. Me feeling whole in the water alongside the adrenaline rush while competing is the best feeling in the world to me.

Swimmer 14

The question definitely correlates with previous family issues from before. My family started out being a basketball and swim family, and later we turned into a swim family. Junior year in high school is when we determine whether or not we want to swim for college. My older brother was on board with the idea of swimming with a college team, however my father

disliked the idea. He decided to swim for college, which is what he desires, however ever since then, my father tried to convince me not to swim for college. The reason why he wants his kids not to swim for a college team is because he thinks that it would be a distraction for us, which can lead to failing in classes. He also wanted us to become a "NARP", which stands for "non-athletic regular people" because since we've grew up in a swimming community, most of our friends are from there and he thinks that we should branch out a bit more.

I knew I wanted to swim for college. Not only because it was a way for me to make new friends, but I would have a second family as well. I knew that a new environment is a perfect way for me to succeed in life. It took a lot of convincing to get my dad on board with me swimming in college, however he told me that freshman year will be the only year that I'll swim for college. The devastating news fired me up to do my best in school and in the pool. After my first year as a college student, I was so happy that I made it through the school year as a student-athlete. Last summer, I had a talk with my father about swimming for all four years in college. Bringing up the topic was nerve racking, especially when my father despises swimming. After the talk, my father finally told me why he actually doesn't want us to swim for college, which is understandable.

So why did I put large amounts of effort to convince my dad to allow me to swim for all four years in college. Throughout ten years of swimming, the sport has shaped me into who I am. One of the reasons why is gaining confidence, The challenging sets that I've swam with the team helped me gain confidence. Even if there are challenges that are not swimming related, I know that I can overcome them because it's nothing compared to the sets that I've swam. Another reason why is because the pool is my second home. Every swimmer dislikes getting in the cold water, and it applies to me as well. But I have swimmers with me who go through the same challenges as me, and it helps us bond as a team and friends. Another reason why is the title of being a swimmer. People already know me as a swimmer in the beginning, so why not keep the title going and keep improving on the sport that I love (an can only play since basketball and cross country was a fail). I can swim on my own for recreation, but it would not be the same as competing.

Swimmer 15

I have always had an interesting relationship with swimming and being a swimmer. Swimming wasn't something that I liked to showcase or talk about with my

friends. I had a lot of close friends not even know that I was on a swim team until they heard my name on the announcements after winning a race at state or saw my name on the school record board. They would say, "wait, you swim?" and I would say, "yeah.I guess?". I would say things like that as I was preparing for a big meet, running for team captain, celebrating a big victory or new cut, or preparing to sign with a D1 university. "Yeah, ..I guess I'm a swimmer."

I don't think that I was ever embarrassed or anything about being on a swim team. I think a lot of it came from the fact that I didn't feel like I worked as hard as other swimmers on my team, which may have been true. I was lucky to have my natural talent carry me through most of my high school career. I missed a lot of practices, I didn't train as hard as I could have, and I definitely wasn't as dedicated to the sport as other members of my team. People knew this about me. I once had a teammate tell me that my talent for the sport isn't what would hold me back, but it was my work ethic that would. For some reason, this didn't really bother me.

I think that once I began working hard, I was more comfortable calling myself a swimmer. I was very scared to swim in college, in fact, I really didn't plan on it in the slightest. I didn't think that I had it in me to work so hard at something, and I definitely didn't think that I was fast enough. I decided to swim in college, and I had a lot of teammates and parents of teammates express their doubts in me. I had a parent of a teammate tell me that she didn't think I would make it through my first year of college swimming. Again, this didn't really bother me.

I started swimming in college, and I realized that working hard was fun and rewarding. It also helped me realize that I had been a swimmer all along. My relationship and love for this sport grew as I invested more time and energy into it, and I got to see it pay off. My confidence in my skills grew, and I got to step away from the idea that it was just my "natural talent" carrying me. I think that I have always been a swimmer, even though I didn't think I was, but it took getting out of my own head and thinking that I didn't work as hard as everyone else to realize that I was.

Swimmer 16

Becoming a swimmer was pretty easy at a young age. I wanted to do something to keep me active. I wanted to do a sport where I could meet and make new friends. Swimming did just

that. As the years went by, the want to go back to the pool day after day, got harder. I had to find my want again, and once I did, my decision came easy. I realized that I became a swimmer because I loved the feel of the water and the people that this sport gave me. I go back day after day and week after week because I want to. I go because I want to get better, I want to laugh with my friends, and I want to do what makes me most happy. Each day is unique and different because I have a new mindset every time I go into the pool. I think to myself that I will make this practice more unique than the last one. This helps the want to go to the pool and the happiness I feel from being a swimmer. I became a swimmer because it was something I wanted, but I have stayed a swimmer because I fell in love with it!

Swimmer 17

I choose to swim because it's hard. I chose swimming in the first place because it really tested how tough I was, and I choose swimming every day because I know if I hadn't all those years ago, there is a good chance I wouldn't be proud of who I am today. My home Coach once told me

“It's never been about swimming”, no one swims to stare at the bottom of the pool every day, that's not a good enough reason. I was raised on the notion that it wasn't yours if you didn't work for it. Swimming taught me how to work, and how to endure pain, it taught me the importance of consistency and grit. Swimming taught me how to be kind, how to be a leader and how to be confident. And it was these things that kept me coming back. I knew that I could pass my math test because it wasn't as hard as yesterdays practice and I knew that I was strong enough to do a speech in front of the whole school because I had swam 3 miles that morning, and if I could do that, I could do anything. Some days, when swimming for myself wasn't enough to get me back to practice, I would swim for my littles, they needed me, or for my coach who had sacrificed so much for me. But most days I would go to practice because the struggle was thrilling and being in the water made me feel strong. I became a swimmer the day I realized that despite being short, and little, and having the body type probably better suited for rugby, I was undoubtedly good at being in the water. I love what I do, and I couldn't be prouder of where I am, and it's all because of swimming. Swimming made me want more, expect more and not settle, and because of that I would choose it over and over again.

Swimmer 18

Like I mentioned last week when I first started swimming it was because my sister did it, so I didn't really know any different. However, as I've grown up through the sport of swimming, I have learned how much this sport means to me and how much it has shaped me into the person I am today. I have always been a pretty quiet person, but swimming has helped me express who I am and the person I want to be. In the past, I never really felt like I could be myself at school and I would always find myself comparing myself to others, but then when I would go to swim practice after school, there was just something about the environment that made me a whole different person. Just being in the water I feel like I can express who I am without feeling like I needed to be someone I'm not. I choose to return to the water day after day because it feels like a safe place where I can be who I am. I know it's not good, but sometimes it's hard for me to show when I'm hurting, and I just keep it to myself. Especially this past year having a lot going on with family and personal stuff I sometimes get down on myself but walking on deck for practice and being around my teammates and in the swimming environment, it helps me to relieve some of that stress. I don't want to say swimming defines me, but it has been such a significant part of my life that it has become a big part of who I am. Since I have been around the pool and swimming for my whole life, being a swimmer is the normal for me. I don't remember a time in my life that I wasn't involved with swimming, but I honestly can't imagine my life without it. Swimming has also contributed to my work ethic and has always made me want to work harder in everything I do in and out of the pool. Having to take a break from swimming due to Covid really made me realize how much I need it. I had a little bit of a hard time over quarantine not being able to swim or let out my emotions.

Swimmer 19

It is hard for me to describe when I became a swimmer. In my mind I always have been. I have always been in the water whether it be at a beach somewhere, lake, or pool. Thinking more into it I think that I became a swimmer when I became aware of the specifics. For as long as I could remember I could get behind the blocks and swim a race, no problem. But that is just swimming, not being a swimmer. I would say when I moved to California is when I started to become aware of the specifics of the sport. I understood that if I worked on specific aspects of my sport, or a race strategy that it could improve my performance. This

became a challenge, a game almost. I became interested in these different individual goals, and I would work on them with my brother. I remember once in practice *Brother*, and I worked together to improve our body positions by doing hand lead freestyle kick. We got reprimanded by the coach because we “weren't working hard” and we “needed to do that on our own time”. This frustrated both of us because that was one of our goals. We cared about the little nitty gritty things rather than swimming aimless 200s long course, because we would quickly lose focus and our effort would fade. I believe that when I became aware of each moving part within the sport and became interested in how to actually improve, rather than just mindlessly swim a race because I could, I became a swimmer. This is the same time when I became an individual within the sport and created a name for myself, rather than being told that it was just in my blood, and I don't work hard to be good. This individuality made me understand that I could be good. I could make something of the sport. Here and there I have had some setbacks, but this realization and growth has made my experience with the sport much greater.

Swimmer 20

Touching on a point that was in my last entry, I think the most significant moment in my swimming timeline was CCS my sophomore year swimming the 2 and 5 free. My freshman year I had missed the cut by .15 and at two dual meets my sophomore year I missed it by .01 and .02 in the 500. When I finally made it, I was very exciting and relieving but I remember feeling it wasn't good enough, like I should have already made it. Since I hadn't made the cut my much, I was in one of the slowest heats at the meet. I remember deciding that I was going to make it a good swim, I was just so excited to be there. And after having an unexpected drop earlier that day in the 200 I was in great spirits. I ended up having another unexpected drop and I remember getting out of the pool with the biggest smile on my face and hugged my coach. It made me feel so good about myself. I wanted that feeling of becoming something strong to last forever. But what made me realize that I would always return was that even after that race I knew I could do better. And that feeling has been a trend after pretty much all of my good races from that point on. I keep coming back because I know I can be better than the day before and I want to know what that feels like. I like the drive and confidence it gives me. Striving to be the best I can be is my own.

Swimmer 21

I think I said a little bit about why I return to the water every day and every week in the first journal entry, but I will continue. Being a swimmer means being tough mentally and having a desire to perform your best and to improve yourself everyday even if it's something really small. Being in the water has helped me in so many ways... It has helped me find myself and has helped me become stronger in and out of the pool. I return to the pool every day & week simply because I love it. It is a way to keep my mind off of stress, anxiety, nerves...etc. It helps clear my mind of anything that may be bothering me; gets me away from reality. It also challenges me, and I LOVE challenges. It challenges me mentally and physically while also helping me improve in the slightest. At the end of the day, I am proud of how far I have come and think of how much swimming has helped me. I had a love hate relationship with swimming growing up as well, but I eventually got past that and realized that swimming was for me and there was no way of getting rid of it because I was born a swimmer!

Swimmer 22

No response

Swimmer 23

There are a plethora of memories of hardship and success in my swimming career that has made me fall deeper in love with the sport, but I think the moment I BECAME a swimmer was when my parents gave me the ultimatum that I mentioned in my first entry of swimming year-round or quit swimming as a whole. I think this is when I became a swimmer because it was the first ever real sacrifice, I made for the sport. It was the beginning of a long and complicated relationship; it was where everything started. It was the first moment I said yes when my body said no. It was the first moment I became fully committed to something (which is a bit deal to a 6th grader). I come back to the pool day after day, week after week (even when I fell out of love) because I loved who I became and how I felt when in the water. I have yet to find another activity that makes me feel the same euphoric feeling I get when I swim. When I swim, I become happy, even if I had a bad day and not talking to my friends at practice, I am happy because I feel free. I feel free because I can literally satisfy any of my needs, swimming allows me to think clearly when I need to, it allows me to forget everything for 2 hours, it allows me to get aggression out in the form of a grind. Swimming has become my form of self-therapy. So far in my time of being a swimmer I have learned a

great deal of discipline, in and out of the pool. It has taught me perseverance, the powerful connection between the mind and body, and unique perfectionism.

Swimmer 24

I remember starting to swim when I was pretty young, maybe 3-4 years old. But even before that, I always loved being near the water. I have this extremely vivid memory of my grandma giving me a bath in her kitchen sink, and it was one of my favorite things to do when I was a baby. When I was maybe 18 months, my parents got me one of those wading pools, and I used to sit in it and play with my rubber ducks and love it. My mom and I used to go to the public pool when I was 3-4, and we used to paddle around there together. We went a whole bunch too, maybe 2-3 times a week. Eventually, she realized that because I love swimming and being in the water so much, she should enroll me in a swim team and that is what we did. I was not very competitive when I first started swimming. I went to practice just because I wanted to be in the water, I wanted to learn more about swimming and hopefully one day I could excel. When I was 10, my parents, myself and my coaches decided that I was getting too good to be in such a small, not very competitive club. My parents wanted to make sure that this is what I wanted, however, that I was not just swimming because I was told to, and I told them that this was the activity that I wanted to pursue. So, we dropped all the other activities that I was doing (dance and gymnastics), and we focused just on my swim career. I think being playful can be interpreted in many ways. The way that I take it is that I should be enjoying my time in the water now, just as I used to when I played in the wading pool. I believe that being playful is also associated with having a playful, positive environment. Having a good attitude can influence the rest of your team to smile as well. A good attitude goes a long way from my experience. Training can sometimes be downright terrible. Sometimes you might not have the motivation, or the set is just the worst, but seeing someone who is smiling through the pain, and demonstrating a good attitude can transfer to you. Try to make the best out of a bad situation: even though this set is not something I want to do, I know that in the long run, this will make me a better swimmer. Work hard play hard right?

Swimmer 25

No response

Week 3 Daily Dance verses the Daily Grind

Reflection Prompt:

We began this week talking about the idea of practice or training. On Monday your coach attempted to break down all the various things that occur during a practice, sights, sounds, smells, cadence, tears, laughter, exploration, mindlessness and mindfulness. On Wednesday, we read a short passage from *Spirituality of Sport* that described the beautiful last practice of two collegiate rowers witnessed by their coach. On Friday, you got into small groups of teammates to discuss things that occur when you train together.

When you think about all the many possibilities that happen in the pool every day and compare that to our metaphor of the “dance” the “grind” of training transforms into something beautiful or even spiritual as described by Saint Sing. Describe your daily dance of training and how endurance could be transformed into exploration.

Swimmer 1

How I interpret the daily dance is why I love swimming and the root cause of why I swim. However, the daily grind often covers the daily dance when I focus too much on the outcome without enjoying the journey. For example, today we did our 50's and I did most of them freestyle and I kept on going "slow" times which kind of got to me but everyone else was just enjoying swimming fast. So, I realized that it's okay where I am at right now, and I got excited that my times were consistent, and I can only go faster from there. This is an example of how I was practicing the daily grind but then I chose to do the daily dance. I run into the daily grind often because I want to be one of the really fast swimmers but in retrospect, I need to focus on myself and the daily dance to be the best I can be. I think a huge cause of this is because I moved up to one of the highest groups on my swim team when I was too young, and I was swimming with my role models who were way faster than me. I always got too caught up if I was going as fast as them or if I wasn't that I never focused on the dance and myself. I kinda think we should balance the grind and the dance because you gotta go hard sometimes to get through but also focus on yourself and why you love to do what you do.

Swimmer 2

The topic this week was an interesting one and really made me think. Sports in general are considered a grind, you are putting in hours to become better at something. You see posts on

social media that have quotes relating to "grind time" and striving to get at that point. Because of that I have considered swimming a grind, but I was doing something that I loved; this week made me think about the sport differently and how I look at the hours spent in the pool.

When we split up into small groups, I understood the topic and how it works in my mind. When we start swimming, it is a "dance", we are not worried about the clock, and we have no pressure on ourselves to drop time. We are having fun in the pool and enjoying being able to swim. When we get up into the club level there is pressure added; you are wanting to drop time and you are wanted to get noticed by college coaches. You are wanting to be great, and the hours spent in the pool can become a "grind" because of that aspect. That is how it was for me. When I am frustrated with how I'm swimming or if I am having a bad season, every time I get into the water it feels like a grind because I am wanting to get back to where I was. But when I am feeling good and connecting with the water it feels like a dance; just being able to flow smoothly through the water.

The reading this week has made me look at myself in a different way. After college, I will not be competing competitively anymore and that is going to be an emotional change for me. It is something that has been with me and part of my routine for 12 years. After hearing the ending of the book, I told myself that I want to look at every practice, every meet, and just every time I jump into the water as a "dance". Yes, some days will be harder than others because I may be sore, maybe stressed from school, or may just be exhausted mentally but that should turn the sport into a "grind". When I get into the water I am just going to swim and that is it. I'm going to try not to get upset about the clock or how I feel, because tomorrow may be different. I think most of my life I have looked to the sport as a grind and I think that needs to end now, I have a lot of love for the sport and that itself should turn it into a "dance".

Swimmer 3

The daily dance vs the daily grind. When I think of grind, I think of the hard times needed to go through in order to reach goals, push to the next level, or make something spectacular out of something ordinary. When I think of a dance or think of rhythm, connection, and letting go and trusting the process. Where these two things cross is when my body hurts so bad but I

push past it enough to reach that next level: whether it a tenth of a second or a whole second. Altogether I believe these things go hand in hand.

Rhythm- rhythm is the sole to dance. It's what creates the beat and mood of each individual song. I find my rhythm in the pool through pattern. I have always been a pattern-oriented person in a sense that if I did something for a certain amount of time, I would do something different for the same amount of time to even things out. I believe this has helped create my balance because it keeps my head clear and focused. I'm not worries about overdoing butterfly when I have backstroke to counter it. And just to even get away from my two main strokes I will throw free into my lineup as well. It's all a working balance, like three steps to my rhythm. If my pattern is not balanced, I tend to compensate by overdoing or overthinking one stroke. I have noticed this especially as I started working more and more in practice. I have to have a counter to what I do to keep my brain interested and to keep my body happy. I get bored and lose my rhythm when I don't have a pattern. Even a pattern as simple as breath count, kick count, or underwater kicks. I swim so much more efficient when think about what I'm doing.

Connection- dance can connect something so little to something so meaningful. It can be created by a few beats or steps into a very intricate set of moves that not everyone can accomplish. Swimming is the same way. It is simple motions twisted and turned into very unique intricate moves that take years to accomplish and perfect if that's even possible. Always evolving always moving. This is what makes the dance so special because there is no wrong answer as to how one person executes a race. There might be a grind to swim one way because that is considered the correct way, but the dance come in when you can take that perfected thing, tweak it and make it your own because it works for you.

The grind and that mindset can sneak up on you anytime. In and out of the pool. I believe that turning that grind into a dance comes from your own knowledge of yourself and how you tick. This allows for any situation to be put in a new perspective and executed in a new way. Whether in a meet or practice stay true to what makes you work and what your body knows, don't change your dance because it may look better in someone else eyes. If you know it works, it works. Trust the process. Trust your process.

Swimmer 4

My daily dance consists of waking up at the crack of dawn to hop in the pool. Most would say that doesn't appeal to them however, I have found true happiness in the morning ritual. I used to focus on how I felt when I woke up at 5:00 am. I would often tell myself that I don't feel like going and that I am too sore or tired to attend. Essentially, making excuses. Now that I am older, I have recognized the true beauty in morning swims. I love getting up and hopping in my car and listening to my one pump up song before I go into the locker rooms to change. I love getting to see the sunrise. I appreciate the cold water when I hop in the pool and the sound of the coaches' voice when he gives us our first set. How many people get to say they've seen the sunrise every morning? How many people get to say they've already finished the hardest part of their day at 9 am? All in all, I appreciate the daily dance of training and it has taken time to realize the beauty in it. Even on days when training seems like a grind, I am still appreciative of the demand, because I know it's only going to make the dance more beautiful.

Swimmer 5

Every time I jump into the pool, I am always nervous about how I might feel. It's always different, some days I can be so sore and yet have a great dance that practice. Same goes with feeling amazing before I get in to realize that the strokes aren't flowing how I want them to. Strokes are always so mental to me, and I try to think about so many aspects of each one at once. I honestly like to think about each stroke as its own person, so this relates pretty well to the dance analogy. Especially with my favorite stroke breaststroke we mostly get along, but it honestly takes up more of my energy always thinking about every detail more than doing it. Trying to focus on the little things is always the most important to me and I take a lot of pride in ensuring that I can dance in the water more times than grinding. I also find that finding ways to dance when swimming becomes a grind can be easy. Being able to change between a grind during a hard set into a dance is truly beautiful and for me it's a huge mindset thing. Your mind can trick your body into anything it wants you just have to tell yourself a thousand times until you believe it. For me when I practice, I try to only dance and have small times where I'm grinding and in a kind of funk. The flow of strokes is what makes me happiest and when I swim breaststroke with that flow that I know I can have, that's what makes it so beautiful and worth it for me. The constant practices help me to normalize the

flow and the dance so that soon I can improve and dance even better than before since my endurance and swimming capacity has grown. When I practice, I try to think more than just rip through the water and I hope that its noticeable through the way I move in the water. Currently, it feels more so like a grind because I'm just not used to really swimming but the more drills and strokes, I do, I feel myself coming back into a flow. I also think its nice cause it's always a chase for me to flow so well that I don't even have to feel like It's me moving through the water but instead it's me going with the motion of it. Overall, as I continue to go through practices, I know that I will most likely have high highs and low lows but for the most part I'll be improving and trying to strengthen myself by just enjoying and building on my relationship with my body and the water.

Swimmer 6

Training is a dance and a grind. The dance part for me is when I feel good and fast in the water. I feel like I'm at the top of the world and nothing can stop me. I feel very proud and accomplished of the effort I put into a set every day. With all things, there is always a price to pay for greatness. Talent and luck can only get you so far, but hard [work] and the grind will get you where you want to go. The grind part of swimming for me is waking up early for practice and pushing myself when I know I feel very fatigued and tired. Especially this last week I felt mostly the grind part and not much of the dance part. But I know eventually my body will get used to what I did before and then I will feel much more energetic and not as fatigued in the water.

Dancers, athletes, students- they all put in so many behind the scene hours that others don't realize. To perform in a show, dancers spend countless hours practicing on their form and executing their dance. People who watch them think they're dancing is beautiful and majestic, but they don't realize how much practice went into it. Same with athletes and students. Countless hours have been spent trying to shave some time off a race or trying to ace that test. It takes work and dedication always. To perform the dance, one must master the grind aspect of it.

Swimmer 7

I typically describe my life as a grind. When I wake up in the morning, I go to practice and grind. If I'm not at practice, I typically get up an grind out some homework because I know my day will be packed. When I go to school, I grind out my notes and listen intently to my

professors. After school, I go to practice and grind out some more yards, then I come back home and grind out my homework before going to sleep. Over the summer, I ground out 40+ hours a week at the grocery store. I feel like I hardly have time to catch a breath most days, but I wouldn't want it any other way. I thrive on staying busy and having goals to work towards. Whether it's getting an A on my econ exam, hitting a certain pace consistently during practice, or logging long hours at work over the summer to make some money for college, I always have something I want to accomplish associated with each task I do every day. I love checking things off of my checklist and knowing I did what I set out to do. However, after the country shut down in March due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I realized that perhaps it's okay to slow down sometimes. Not everything should be done in a rush or with a particular goal in mind. Sometimes, it's okay to do something just because you love it or because you want a minute to yourself. With all my free time during that period, I took the time to appreciate the things I once took for granted. When I didn't have access to a pool, I thought I would give anything just to be in the water again, floating on my back or gliding off the wall. I spent quality time with my family and recognized just how important they are in my life. I reconnected with my old and new friends simply because I could and now had plenty of time to. That was the silver lining of this whole experience: finding new respect for the small things in life. And swimming is definitely one of those things. You never fully appreciate something until it's gone, and though I knew I would eventually be able to get back in the water again, not knowing when that would be was extremely difficult. That day I finally got to hop back into the pool in early June, I was ecstatic. It didn't matter how fast I swam, how many yards I did, or how I felt physically. What mattered was the joy, freedom, and love I felt just being in the water. That's when I truly recognized that swimming is a dance, even though sometimes it can feel like a grind. The connection I have with this sport is beautiful and unique and I wouldn't trade it for the world.

Swimmer 8

The dance and the grind are both essential to the sport that we call our own and at times they can be used interchangeably. Most of the time though the dance embodies everything that we love about the sport when we are completely and utterly absorbed in the sport, nothing else matters. You become immersed in the flow of your stroke, the sounds of the water splashing or going down the drain, the stillness of the water when you first walk into the pool

and the smell of chlorine. The other side of the sport is the grind which is closely related to the mental struggles that you experience in and out of the pool. It is the fight you have with yourself to get out of bed every morning, the fight to jump into the pool that you know is going to be cold, or the struggle of pushing yourself to the next level when your arms just don't seem to want to move anymore. You can't swim competitively for so many years and not experience both the dance and the struggle at least once, but hopefully, the grind is frequented much less than the dance. As my old coach used to say when on our last day of practice before a big meet like sectionals; you have earned your ticket, now go enjoy the dance party.

Swimmer 9

For me the dance is always there, the dance is the movement of the water underneath my hands, the routine of putting my cap and goggles and diving into the frigid water, the constant cleaning of my goggles in the water, the pounding of my heart beating in my ear. The dance is always there, the water is our partner, and the water guides you through the dance of practice or the dance of a race. The dance of the water is always there and it's the best feeling, but the grind always comes, and I feel like for me it can overpower the dance of the water and I forget the dance. Being a swimmer, or just being an athlete drains you and drains you fast. I get tired having doubles and weights, I love it but I'm psychically and mentally exhausted by the end of the week. And sometimes having the grind is good, it keeps me focused and I can just swim and lift and work out, but that can wear me out sometimes and I remember the dance of the water. And I remember its calming affects, and honestly, I think I have same my best when there's an equal balance of both the grind and the dance. I've dropped time when I have worked hard and grinded for weeks and weeks but then it comes time to race, and I trust myself and I trust the water. Most of the time I trust the water, but I doubt myself therefore I psych myself out and mess with my head game. But when I trust myself, the grind, the dance, and the water there is nothing that can hold me back. I just need to learn how to trust myself and not mess with my head before I race.

Swimmer 10

I'll be honest, I am physically and mentally exhausted right now. It has been a really long week and I feel like everything piled on at once, but that's what this sport is all about. You have to learn to dance and at the same time continue to grind. Nothing about what we do is

easy, and it shouldn't be. However, everything we do has to be looked at two different ways, intertwined into one (if that makes any sense). The only way I get through a practice is by, literally dancing, and by embracing both the grind and dance of the swimming life. Practice, most of the time, is hard and if it's not, I make it hard. I always want to grind, but the only way I can is by uplifting everyone else and do it with a smile on my face. One of the weirdest things about this sport is we love it and hate it when we can't do it, but at the same time can complain about hard sets or even having to get in at all. My life is split up into categories, so I know when to put one part on hold and focus on another. When I come into the pool, I try my hardest to leave all my other baggage in the locker room because no one else needs to feel down just because I do. This sport has changed my life in so many ways and I love it and all the people that I've met from it, and the only reason I've gotten through it is by embracing both the dance and the grind.

Swimmer 11

Each day when I arrive at the pool, I truly try to put my emotions aside and just enjoy where I am. The pool has been a second home for most of my life whether things are going good or bad. I believe that each day is a new day, and as you said, when you get in the water, it is never the exact same water from the time before. I have never thought of it that way, but I have always thought of each practice as a new one. I am not one to hold onto the past, or never not let anyone back into my life. I don't stay mad for long, and that is the approach I try to take at each practice. Yes, sometimes that is not possible, and practice does become a grind. Yes, sometimes I am still frustrated from the practice before, or emotionally unstable from exterior things in life (as we saw yesterday); however, I truly try to just be present in the time I am in. There has been many times where I found swimming was just a tool to use in my life. It is the way I make friends. The way to stay in shape and be active. It is the way to get an experience of a lifetime and go to school in another country. Sometimes now it even feels like a job. It is unfortunate when swimming becomes just a tool, but then I look at who is around me. Each person on this team makes me realize that this is so much more than just a job, this is a family. No matter what happens, this team and the pool is here for you. I cannot say that every day I want to get in that water, and it is a grind. There are days that are completely the opposite. I am not sure I would say that I have master the dance,

or that I am completely happy with swimming all the time. But there are where I truly know that the sport and I have a connection.

Swimmer 12

I think that I see a lot of the practices as more of a grind like a job is. There are little glimmers of a dance sprinkled within each practice and meets though that remind me why I love the sport. Those little glimmers of dance makes it all worth it though. The serenity of being in the water is a sort of dance, and it is calming to my soul. When I come into practice each day, the world beyond the pool deck fades away. That itself is a magical part of swimming. No matter what day it is or what is happening in life the pool deck always stays relatively the same. In endurance sets, my mind wanders to all different subjects and thinks deeply about them. In my everyday busy life outside of the pool this rarely happens. The sport gives me a chance to explore my inner thoughts.

Swimmer 13

My daily dance vs. daily grind is separated and influenced by mood and atmosphere. It's a grind if I'm in the mood where I don't want to be here and I'm swimming just to get in my 9-5 hours, almost like a job you hate but need to get paid for. I get in these moods when I'm in a ditch, I feel like I can't breathe and can't escape it. Whether it's a struggle in my personal life that engulfs me or it's a struggle in self-improvement in the thing I do daily, it's hard to come out with a positive mindset when I get stuck here. That's where the difference in daily dance comes in. My daily dance is wanting to be in the water, excited to feel the cool, blue world and see my friends. When I dance with swimming, I feel unstoppable, like I can do what the "fast people" feel all the time. But there is just one problem, it's impossible to get there easily. Moving from a grind to a dance is for me is all dependent on what I'm feeling, and I can't make that switch go on as easy as I can make it go off.

Swimmer 14

In my opinion in order to dance you need to grind. Training is the grind, you come to practice every day working your butt off for the "dance" in this case a competition or certain event. But the dance for me can mean more than just grinding every day for one race or competition. It's about enjoying every moment of the grind knowing I put 110% effort in grinding and that makes me personally feel amazing. I don't need a clock or time in an event to tell me my hard work is paying off I should just know that when I'm grinding, I'm giving

that 110% so the clock or time in the event will come naturally. “The dance” will become a given if you give that 110% grinding.

Swimmer 15

Not all practice sessions are the same. Most of the time I'm familiar with the weekly routine with the practice schedule such as Wednesdays are always IM days. The mindset when practicing changes as well. Swimming is a stress reliever for me; however, I still think of how fatigued I am from classes and morning practice.

I try to get my mind off of fatigue by going through my dance. The dance consists of focusing on what I can do better from a reflection of last season. I would consider this as the endurance part of swimming because practice and adaptation are long processes. Learning how to change my mindset, supporting my teammates in and out of the pool, focusing on making adjustments to my race plans and strokes, and jamming to the music during the swim are what I think about when I'm going through my dance in the pool.

Swimmer 16

When I first think of swimming, I certainly consider it a grind. Mostly because it is hard, really hard. Getting up early and pushing my body to its limits isn't something that I would necessarily consider a "dance". I have always viewed swimming as a tool, a tool that I use to get things. Currently, I'm using swimming as a tool to get an education. I treat swimming more like a job than anything, it's just something that I do.

As I have reflected this week, I got to think about why swimming has always been more of a grind for me. The most difficult time for me in my swimming career is when I was in 8th grade, and I got really sick. My chronic illness prevented me from going to school, made it very difficult to sleep or eat, and was just very tough in general. The doctors told me and my mom that there weren't any treatments, but exercise was something that could help. The top recommended exercise was swimming. When I say that swimming during this year was a grind, I really mean that it was a grind. Swimming everyday during this time was literally terrible, but it actually was helping. Again, I was using swimming as a tool, but in this case, it was a tool that was going to help me manage my chronic illness. Swimming still works in this way from me. My chronic illness is still around, but I manage it by swimming and working hard, because once I stop swimming, I start to feel symptoms again.

I view swimming in this way, but I also really enjoy it. I love the people and the way it makes me feel. I really do love it, and so sometimes it feels like a dance even though I am grinding. Swimming is really both for me, because I have to do it, but I also really enjoy it. I think that I am really lucky because of this. Not only does swimming bring me a lot of opportunities, friends, and health benefits, but it also is something that I enjoy.

Swimmer 17

The daily grind in swimming is something that I feel comes naturally to everyone. But when it comes to the daily dance, it something that is more of a falling in love process. I know each day I will have 1 to 2 practices and I know I can't miss them. To me, that is what the daily grind is. The daily dance is something way different to me. The dance is that want to go to the pool. It is that feeling of gliding through the water, always pushing yourself a little bit more. When thinking about the daily grind compared to the daily dance, I see the grind as pushing yourself more and more even when you don't feel your best but the daily dance, is listening to your body and doing the best you can in that moment. Endurance in the daily grind can be turned into exploration when you take more of a daily dance approach to it. An open and accepting mindset can turn a difficult endurance set into something accomplishable and exciting. I think I need to have more of a daily dance perspective when swimming so that I remember to listen to my body and remember each day why I love my sport.

Swimmer 18

For me, I find my dance in the beauty of what I do. I think in competitive sports it's very easy to get lost in the wins and losses, the added time, or the sub-par performance. I have had a lot of anxiety surrounding swimming the past couple of years and one of the things that helps me the most is grounding. It's a very simple thing, I just take some time while I am swimming to notice the little things, I normally would give no thought to. The way the water sounds when it enters the gutters, the way the bottom of the pool reflects on the surface. These things are so simple, yet they remind me that there is beauty in what I do. That's the dance to me, when I can ground myself, I feel connected to the water, everything flows, everything feels better. When I grind, I focus on results, but the dance helps me find beauty and purpose in swimming.

Swimmer 19

In my swimming experience I have noticed the difference in how my training looks as in a dance or a grind completely depends on my attitude when getting in the water. There are going to be some tough days that makes you just want to get through practice, but if I still have a good attitude about it, I find that I do significantly better, and it turns into the daily dance. I think my teammates and coaches contribute to this as well because when everyone is laughing and cheering each other on throughout practice, it doesn't make it feel like a grind. Especially this season I feel like it is easier for me to think of it as a dance rather than a grind because we aren't guaranteed a season, so I don't feel the same amount of pressure as usual. I think this mindset has also allowed me to train even faster at practice, which makes me more and more excited to come back every day.

Swimmer 20

I think that the difference between the "dance" or the "grind" is the state of mind that you are in. I had an 18-hour drive with my *Brother* to come back up to school and about two of those hours consisted of talking about mental capacities and mental health. Some of it did go right over my head, but some of it really clicked with me. Humans only have seven "boxes" in their brains. You only have the mental capacity to fill up those seven. Swim could be a box, family, school, relationships...they all fill up boxes. *Brother*, for example, could try to teach me about electrical engineering and one simple thing that fills up one box in his mind, could fill up all seven of mine, causing me to become stressed and not learn anything from the discussion.

Dancing is fun and freeing and a way to escape, in some ways swimming can be that dance. I feel like it is a dance when I am feeling good in the water, I am having fun with my teammates, I am in a good place mentally, and physically. I feel like swimming is a dance when my stress levels are not through the roof, when I have schoolwork under control, when I can truly focus on the sport and enjoy it. Other times, swimming can purely feel like a grind. When all of my boxes are full, things don't seem to be going right for me, swimming feels like a grind. That is when I wake up and may cry before a practice just due to the stresses of life. That is when I swim aimlessly, not gaining anything, because my mind is elsewhere. That is when I feel as if it is more of a job, rather than a passion.

This “dance” and “grind” can change day by day, or sometimes even simultaneously. I am always working on making it a dance, but sometimes life outside of swimming takes over.

Swimmer 21

For me mindset it a big thing day by day and hearing the expression of daily dance has improved my outlook even within the last week. It can almost go without saying this week was hard since many of us haven't had a full week of practice like this in nearly 6 months. It took a certain mental toughness to jump back into doubles, weights, and mornings all in addition to classes. I deeply want to create a habit for feeling good walking onto deck and the thought of the daily dance makes that so much easier. For example, Thursday morning was, in my opinion one of the harder practices this week. Except that was also the practice that I had the best time at. I feel so groggy and slow diving in early that morning. And in general, mornings take a lot longer for me to warm up and get up to speed. But after a while about halfway through the 10x150s odds free evens im with fins I felt more awake and that in it of itself felt so good to gain. I probably didn't even change speeds much. But I thought about the daily dance, and how that whole practice could have been a grind but with the addition of that perspective, I felt lighter, happy that I went through the grogginess to get to feel good now. After that going into some 25s of the blocks, expedited even more how extremely happy I was to be there. And even today, this Saturday, the 8 50's from the blocks were hard. Between the long week and not having swam fast for a long time it was no surprise. And under other circumstances that might have been emotionally draining. But laughing with *teammate* and *teammate* next to me and sometimes even literally dancing, I couldn't have enjoyed it more. I love to dance, I do it in my room all the time. And I can hardly remember the last time I felt so happy to be swimming. I think I really love swimming because of the dance perspective and now it's put into words. But in conclusion to me the grind and the dance is the difference between feeling like or heavy in the water and through the aspects of practice like my teammates I can switch it from the grind to the dance.

Swimmer 22

This topic for this week was pretty tough to think about. What is my daily dance of training? Well like I have said previously in the other journal entries, swim practice and training is a way to get me to be active and is a way to relieve stress and anxiety. When we were talking in our groups yesterday (Friday) we all said the same exact thing about how swimming won't

be forever, but we will make the most of it. To think about what we will do after college swim, it scares me. For me, I have a love hate relationship with swimming. I love water, I love competing, and I love racing my friends/being motivated to do better in practice or meets. I also love the thought of knowing swimming will always be a part of my life and is the sport for me. BUT I hate/dislike the thought of waking up to go to practice and jumping into the freezing water. It's all temporary and just a negative thought that runs through my head. Once I dive in and am done with warm-up, my competitiveness comes out and I swim as well as I can in that practice. Of course, I still do it because I am a swimmer. I always have been, and I always will be, it runs in my blood. I am still trying to figure myself out in the water and I may always be that way. Today, swimming the 50s off the blocks was tough. I had several thoughts of whether I should sit one out or just go easy on the next one, but I blocked those thoughts out and told myself to push through it. The pain in my legs will be temporary and after the 50s I can reward myself with a nap haha.

Swimmer 23

Think that swimming is often both a dance and a grind. Sometimes you can glide through the water almost effortlessly while others you feel like a brick sinking and fighting your way through the water. And a lot of the times it can even happen in the same practice.

I also can see it as when you're training, you're grinding away trying to become better and building up your grit, and at competitions it's a dance because it's now time for all the hard work to pay off.

But the mentality you have can often determine whether it feels like a dance or a grind too. Sometimes you may not be going very fast but you're still dancing because there's a focus on the water and how you feel. Or you can grind and try to go fast but just pushing yourself into the water ahead instead of actually swimming through.

Swimming is an endurance sport because of the way our body reacts to this type of physical activity. We endure long sets, long practices, and long meet days.

When just looking at the dance and what happens when the whole team is "dancing" it can get really exciting. Everyone tries to uplift everyone else, and we support each other if someone is struggling. But it's more than just support, there's like this wave of energy that comes over the pool deck and can energize the team into doing better and giving it their all.

Swimmer 24

No response

Swimmer 25

No response

Week 4: Play**Reflection Prompt:**

This week we discussed the difference between work and play. On Monday, your coach led a discussion concerning elements of play, using the example of a game of “tag.” On Wednesday, we read from *Sport in a Philosophic Context*, by Carolyn Thomas. While this book is a little more academic, our goal was to begin to think about how we play in the water. On Friday, we “played” a game of sharks and minnows and had a lot of laughs. When you fell in love with swimming, your “dance” in the water was mostly play. Describe what it was like to play in the pool when you were young. We played again on Friday, what was your “lived” experience *being-in-the-water*? Can being more playful with your sport help you cope with difficult times? Please explain.

Swimmer 1

When I was younger, I loved to go early to swim practice so I could play with my friends. We went off the slides, diving boards, made synchronized swimming routines and all of the above. Then we would have fun at swim practice and then run to the showers to blow bubbles out of the soap and prank each other. Swimming was my favorite part of my day and I never got bored of it. Swimming was very intrinsic to me at this point of my life because despite my pets, family, and friends it was the thing I was consumed by because I loved it so much. As years went by swimming became work and the only thing that got me through the long monotonous practices was the idea of playing spike ball and basketball with my friends after. At this time of my life swimming was no longer intrinsic or extrinsic I considered it as work and to grind through the practices and not enjoy my time "dancing" while swimming. About a couple months ago (before this whole covid thing) I really dug deep down and realized why I swim and figured out ways I could have fun. Since this whole covid thing though the whole play thing is very limited and I find myself with more stress and anxiety without play. I realize how much I took advantage of play and just about everything because I miss the old normal and am not keen on what the new reality is. However, even though I

am not always in the right mindset to swim during these times I know it is what's best for me now because I feel it gives me a purpose.

Swimmer 2

When we are younger all we do is play in the water. There are a million pool games out there that each of us have played or have even heard of; with these games, there are similarities that all of us have. We all vividly remember at least one specific game we have played either because of the people we were with or where we were at. One memory I have is with my mom, we would always go in our pool in the backyard and play "Tinkerbell", I know this isn't a usual game that people played, it was one that I made up. I was, and still am, a Disney freak and it honestly has been a huge part of my life as well. Anyway, the game was that we had to protect Tinkerbell from Captain Hook and I had all the little mini figurines of the Peter Pan characters and we would use them in the pool. My mom would hide her from me somewhere and we would go around and save her. It was something that I loved and something that I will always remember.

Being older, when I was at *Swim Club*, we would take a day after a meet and play a game. It was usually considered our recovery day and we would play water polo but instead of a net, we would use a trash can. Or we would use the little underwater rockets and play frisbee underwater with that. I loved these days because it got us out of the "grind" basically. We were able to bond and hang out as a team without the stress of making intervals or staying on paces. You can feel a mood shift when we would walk in, and the lane lines were out of the pool cause we knew we were going to play one of these games.

Overall, I think taking a day to just play in the water is healthy, both mentally and physically. I think we get so invested in the training aspect that we forget all about the play aspect of the water and that you can do so much more than just swimming laps, even if it is relaxing and fun. The atmosphere at the pool is also a way we can play, and I think when we are training the play aspect is still there when we race our teammates and even just singing songs together before we push off the wall.

Swimmer 3

Play has been one of my most important traits I have to come back to each time I'm in the water. Play keeps my head clear and my body strong. It lifts the weights off my shoulders, and it relieves the pressure from my chest as I take deep breaths when I swim. Play is my

way of working out of bad days, whether it be mental or physical. It is a way for me to escape into another world where I can reach goals that are far beyond my human capacity. Play is a way for me to step out of my body and be competitive with no outcome. Which in most cases I race better in that scenario.

I have always been a very competitive person. I would race or challenge my sister and just about anyone I could when I was younger. In and out of the water. I wanted to be the best because I was raised to believe that if you don't give 100% then what is the point of trying at all. And that has shaped who I am today. It is one of my favorite traits about myself. It allows my mind to wonder while still being attached to the task at hand. That is where play comes in. I am a much better practice swimmer than a racer and I need to learn to carry over my playful spirit from a home pool to a competition pool. I can push and feel more alive at the end of a super hard set then I can in a meet because it's a game to me. A game against myself that I need to learn how to bring to every situation. I will hold best times in practice when my legs want to give out and my lungs are grasping for air because something inside of me says push hard it will be worth it. And yet it isn't worth anything to the outside world except a practice, but to me it's everything. It set me up for success each day as I relive that moment of pure awe that my body could move that fast in the water. It's the music that brings the play to practice. It's the smiling faces and the constant cheers, it's the Snippets of conversation that get heard at every wall. That is my play. My play is the environment and the people that push me to be a better athlete. If I was asked to do a fast race at the end of practice my head would be clear, and my mission and purpose would be very transparent. At a meet I have to learn how to get in this head space because my thought and fears and worries cloud my judgement and my mental racing state. The play had left my body. Music helps and my attitude helps bit anyway in practice I am a different person because of the energy and vibe the team gives to me

Swimmer 4

I was about five years old when I attended my first swim lesson. I vaguely remember the exercises the instructors would have us do to feel more confident in the water. The activities were very play oriented. They would have us dive to the bottom of the pool to collect colorful rings or have us fetch floating toys from the middle and bring them back to the gutter. I can almost remember just how thrilling it was to hold my breath and try and scoop

up every ring at the bottom with one breath. I fell in love with the sport's play-aspect when I was young, but I also recognized and enjoyed its competitive features. I loved that I could push myself every session, pick up more rings, or swim farther than before. I loved playing, but I also loved working. To this day, I still believe that play is an integral part of any sport and that you can seek it from anywhere. It doesn't necessarily need to be a game, but rather the implementation of a new activity. It could be a new drill, set, dry land activity, etc. Playing keeps things exciting, and I believe the incorporation of it often is essential to athletic success.

Swimmer 5

Thinking back to when I was younger, I remember that I loved meets because I got to be with my friends. We would each bring different crafts and games and dolls to play with. Then our parents would get us and tell us it's time to warm up so we would all rush to the pool and then play in there right before we swam. I can remember only the best of times from when I was younger and how amazing it would feel to race against myself, while others just happened to be doing the same thing next to me. I'm not sure if its cause I am an only child, but I love swimming with myself. I love being supportive and seeing my teammates go amazing times and try their hardest no matter what. I guess playing to me is the whole experience of being surrounded by your favorite people who all just respect each other for trying their hardest. Of course, I do love a good hypoxic set Hehe and that's when I have the most fun cause it's so relaxing and nice. Being able to play in the water is super important because it centers me and helps me to gather my strokes and mind back. Even when times get stressful or don't go the way I planned, just stepping back and swimming letting the water and stroke take me makes it significantly better and more worth it. Swimming can honestly be brutal mentally, so I believe that considering it more play than work helps to alleviate some stress both in practice and at meets. I know personally I can get too anxious and that energy tires me out but instead I really try to turn that energy into something useful that will help me to succeed. Overall, thinking of swimming as play rather than just work or a grind can mentally connect me to more good memories and success rather than the stress of not performing my best or disappointing myself and my peers.

Swimmer 6

When I was on my second club team we actually played “the game” and we called it “the game”. I thought it was some made up activity and I didn’t know it was played by an Olympic swimmer. We played with a water polo ball, and we would kick and throw the ball. It was super fun and sometimes that would be considered dryland. We would also play tag and hide and seek and those were some of the best years of my life because I was playing with the people that meant the most to me.

Another play activity we also used to do was water polo. Most of the time I would be in the water, and I would try to look for an opening, but I would let the older swimmers do most of the work because if I had the ball, I would just get pummeled. We also played sharks and minnows and I was actually pretty good at it because I would be a minnow and fake people out. I would push off the wall and if somebody was grabbing me and trying to bring me to the surface, I would stay frozen and then at the last moment I would spin away from them. Playing games with people who made me happy was one of the best experiences of my life and sometimes I wish I could go back in time and do it all over again. If I had the chance, I would take it. Reflecting back on those times, makes me appreciate all those special moments I had with my friends. We helped each other out and I thought of them as my second family. I guess in the moment, you never really realize how good those times and years were until they have passed.

Swimmer 7

Not so long ago, I loved playing water baseball with my club team. Every Friday afternoon, after a hard week of club swimming, my coach would divide us into teams and assign us to different "positions" in the pool. While my hand-eye-coordination using the "bat" (a pool noodle) to hit the wiffle ball wasn't great, whenever I got a hit, I would be ecstatic. I would flail my arms and legs as fast as I could to get to the base without being tagged and laugh as my teammates charged at me, trying to get me out. While this might sound like a simple-- maybe even dumb game-- it was something my team and I looked forward to every week. By Friday, we were exhausted, and having those twenty minutes at the end of practice to just have fun in the water, without the pressure of the clock or the dread of one last set before we could go home for the evening and prepare for Saturday morning practice. Here we were, high school-aged kids, having the time of our lives playing a game in the water, just

like we did when we were kids. I used to think my coach's only purpose in letting us play that game each week was to reward us for surviving his grueling practices, but after discussing the importance of play in sports this week, I think he had an ulterior motive. Personally, when it comes to swimming, I can be a pretty serious person. Oftentimes, I think I lose sight of why I began swimming in the first place: simply because it was fun. That game allowed us to remember why we love being in the water and get in touch with our playful sides. I have realized that if you don't ever get back in touch with your playful side in the water-- whether it be through goofing off with friends on the wall between sets, dancing on the blocks before a sprint, or playing games like my club team did-- it can be difficult to be truly connected with the sport. I have shed many tears at past swim meets, usually because I am so invested in my sport that when I feel like I have failed, I get emotional. Instead of shedding tears, this year, my goal is to instead cheer myself up by being with my teammates and friends because they make me happy. We laugh at just about anything, even when we are sad or angry, and I know that they can allow me to get back in touch with this playful side of swimming. Or maybe I will take some time to dive down to the bottom of the pool and "explore" the warm-down pool, reminding myself of the freedom this sport brings me. However, I may decide to handle my emotions moving forward, I want to remember the feeling I felt playing water baseball on my club team and that I am never too old to play.

Swimmer 8

When I think about my start to the sport it all starts with a connection to the summertime, with summer club, swim lessons, and spend every possible day at the neighborhood pool. And as I have gotten older the practices that I remember the most were the ones with games. Whether it was sharks and minnows, gutter ball, torpedo, Frisbee, tournament Tuesday, or even running dives, it didn't matter because we were having fun. Those Saturday practices notorious for being the HARDEST day of the week suddenly didn't seem so bad if coach added gutter ball or an obstacle course race for warm-up. With this, the number one thing that I have learned over the last few years as the seriousness of meets has increased is that the meets, I swim my very best at are the ones that I have the most fun at. When I am having fun, my mind isn't so focused on everything going on around me and the pressures involved with swimming well. To some people even a coach the thought of not thinking

about what I'm going to swim and what I need to do maybe a bad thing, but I found I really swim best with an ALMOST empty mind.

Swimmer 9

What does it mean to play? What does it mean to dance? What does it mean to swim? These are questions we ask ourselves at times. When I started swimming part of the reason was safety reasons, I think everyone should know how to swim, it is an essential life skill. But then like most children, I swam because I liked to play! The little mermaid is one of my favorite Disney princess movies, because who doesn't want to live in the ocean and explore and be a mermaid? For hours I would play mermaid with my older sister, or we would come up with random games that made absolutely no sense. I think some of my favorite memories have been in the water. I have 4 older brothers who are much taller than I am, and stronger, but those days of playing the water with my older brothers and my dad. The feeling of them launching me into the air and landing in someone's arms or in the water. Even if it was cold, I'd make my dad go swimming with me, and we'd play games until he needed a break, but it's those little moments that to most people might seem unimportant, but it's those memories that mean everything to me. Sometimes I get so distracted by the grind and the race that I forget the play, and I think play is essential to racing and success. When I was on my trip in Greece, we'd do long costal swims or crossings, and it was fun, but I remember the times where we played with a ball in the water after lunch, or the laughing till we are all choking on water or laying on my back and staring up into the dark night sky. Or when I swam the 100 back for the 400-medley relay. Most people that know me, know I am not the best backstroke, but I am getting better, all I can do is improve. But I was shocked, I don't usually get put as backstroke on a relay, but for that race I wasn't worried about my time, I was just trying not to lose or die, and having my teammates there cheering and making jokes.... I had fun, it was one of those moments where I had fun and I played, and I improved my time. And obviously you can't just play all the time, and you can't just work hard all the time it won't work. But I realized that I work hard at practice, at dryland, at improving myself in all aspects of life, but when I get to a meet I only focus on the hard work and I doubt myself, because I've worked hard, but I don't trust myself. I don't believe I can succeed. And the times that I have succeeded, I was having fun and I trusted the dance of the water. And after writing these journals I have learned some things about myself. I've known for the past few

years, that I struggle with anxiety and a lack of self-confidence, and each time I write about it I always write, that the times I do, do well I'm not stressed, and I believe in myself. I work hard then I play, I do what I do best and that's race, I love to race, put me anchor on a relay and I will race, I love the feeling of the pressure and the thrill of catching the person ahead and beating them. Bottom line, there needs to be a balance between the grind and play. I have no clue if any of what I just wrote made sense, but to me it did.

Swimmer 10

I started swimming when I was 10 or 11 years old, but before that the only other club sport I really competed in was gymnastics. Gymnastics was a pretty serious sport, at least that's what the crazy moms would say. I don't even remember a lot of my childhood because I was always at the gym. One night I remember pretty vividly was my 8th birthday. I had school all day and right after school I would go straight to practice until 9pm. By the time I got home everyone was asleep, and my mom and I ate my birthday cake alone. Obviously, soon after that I realized that all I wanted to do was be able to spend time with my family and one of the best ways to do that was by swimming. I didn't realize that I would fall in love with it so fast and for this long. On my first team, we would do these meets that were only for the little kids and if we went a certain time, we got stars. The gold star was the highest you could get, and it was my goal to get at least one in every event. Unfortunately, I never got one in the breaststroke. When I moved to my next team, we would do trivia Tuesdays where the whole team would get together and watch a movie then be quizzed on it at practice to determine which set we would do. We also played a lot of frisbee and the game rock, paper, scissors. On my last team, things seemed to get a little less playful and that was more because I was getting older, but sometimes we would get up and race just random relays. Ever since I chose swimming over gymnastics I've never wanted to go back. I don't even need to be playing to be having fun when I'm swimming.

Swimmer 11

From previous journals you know that I started swimming at a very young age. Prior to joining my first club team, I spent much of my time in the local YMCA pool. These were times I do not remember, but based off photos (believe me, there are a lot of photos of me by or in water), I assume lots of play took place in around the water. I do remember going to the beach and spending hours there. I was never afraid of the water, nor did I ever like to leave.

Although I was swimming "competitively" by the age of 5, these days were filled with only happy memories around the pool. As I got older, around 5th grade, I used to build campfires using flutter boards on deck before Saturday morning practice. This play might not have been happening inside the pool, but it was surrounding it. In primary school, everyone takes swimming lessons with their class, times like this were play for me as they were not practice. I already knew how to swim, and it was something easier than the practice I would be doing later that day. I loved everything about the water. Me playing in water was never structured games like colors or tag, it was things like me jumping off the diving board, and there are even photos of me standing on a turned over canoe with the biggest smile on my face.

As I got older, and the number of practices increased, the desire to return to a pool outside of practice diminished. I was only getting in that water because I had to, and I was not touching water any more additional times. This is when play was lost. However, I believe that playing does help with difficult times in sport. Reconnecting with water in the way that I used to as a kid makes you understand why you are here each and every day. I do not think that play has to be structured games where we have to chase each other around the pool for it to be affective. Some of my most memorable and happiest practices are "the games" we used to play at my second club team. These games were sets that were about breaking all the world records as teams, or with fins, or both and you got points according to. Maybe it was just a racing set, but it felt like a game. It was all about working hard, and maybe the fact that your team got bragging rights if they won makes it less of a game because the extrinsic award of more than just participation-- but I always had fun no matter what. I think that playing a sport is important for all children to help with development. I think playing a sport also helps when you are older to find a balance in life when other life gets too much. However, at the collegiate level are we here to just play... no. But can we sometimes just play... I wish. Can we find a balance between play and hard work cohesively... sometimes, and those are the good days.

Swimmer 12

When I was young it amazed me to play in the water. I loved bobbing up and down in the water while I waited for my mom to finish her work. One of my favorite things to do was to push from the bottom super hard and do a flip quickly because it gave me a feeling of strange dizziness for a second. I'm not exactly sure how else to describe that feeling in particular. I

loved it though because I would play mermaids and bring dolls in the water, and it all mesmerized me. It was delightful and I would stay in for hours. As I got older, I did not do this type of play but the feeling of being mesmerized by it never left. My favorite memories and my fastest times have come out of when I was most playful. Being playful means focusing on the happiness and the joy I feel and letting my actions reflect that. It makes the pain better and my goals are easier to push to when in that state of mind. Every moment of greatness has come from that playful nature. When I am not excited about a race, the playfulness leaves and it becomes more of something I have to do. That creates a burden on me, and it just isn't as fun or as successful as when I am playful in the water. Playfulness and success go hand in hand for me. At finals, I am less nervous and that creates a way for me to let myself play and enjoy what I am doing more. It most definitely helps with difficult times by just letting everything else slip away and just focusing on the fun aspect of it.

Swimmer 13

I when I was younger swimming wasn't exercise, rather playing mermaids with my friends or macro polo with the fam. Even though when I was playing games and messing around, I, without knowing it, was working on my underwaters or testing my sprint ability. I'm a firm believer that everyone is born to be something, whether they know it or not and I knew I was born to play in the water. Either doing what I did when I was younger, playing sharks and minnows at youth club, or just doing dolphin dives or ring bubbles now, I've always played regardless of athletic skill. Since we didn't play sharks and minnows on Friday, not that I'm bitter or anything, I still enjoy what we do and I think the atmosphere can, in part take the place of play. Here, we might not play much, but are always in a playful mood, which makes it seem like we're going back in time to a place more youthful and less serious. Being more playful, I think, can make or break you, especially in swim. If it's not enjoyable, then why do what you do. It becomes a job not a sport.

Swimmer 14

Playing in the water when I was younger was one of my favorite things to do. I loved trying to race my older brother or teach my little sister swim lessons. I absolutely loved how free I felt in the water even just playing amongst myself. Whenever I get nervous before a race I try and calm myself down especially if it's a big meet, for example, King County Aquatic Center. I grew up watching my brother compete there and then it was my turn. Moving from

Seattle to Boise and then being able to go back and compete at KCAC always gave me anxiety. Feeling like I need to impress my old team or their parents in the stands and I would eventually sike [sic] myself out. Remembering my roots and when I started to “play” in the water helps bring me back down and enjoy competing regardless of what other people are thinking, I’m enjoying myself when I’m in the water and doing what I love.

Swimmer 15

The first time that I encountered the water, I had to learn how to swim. My mom taught me the basics to swimming, but to make me stay in the water since I disliked the water, she had me play water games with her just so my time in the water didn't feel like I was forced to be in there, rather than convincing me that I should like to be in the water. Water games are how I started my relationship with the water. Whenever I had swim lessons, the instructors made us play games such as, picking up rings from the bottom of the pool, water polo, blowing into pool noodles, and many more. These games were so fun that I even lost track of time. One hour went by so quickly.

When incorporating games into swim practice as a high school and college swim practice, play is most likely considered as competition. I think relays are the closest thing to play as I grew older as a swimmer.

Swimmer 16

In my last post I talked a lot about how swimming felt more like a job to me. Practicing every day and waking up early isn't something that I would consider to be play. However, racing is something that I always considered to be play. When I first started swimming, I rarely went to practice, but I never missed a meet. Meets were so much fun for me. I loved getting to hang out with my teammates and swimming really fast. My coach used to get upset with me because I had so much fun at meets and he didn't think that I was taking it seriously enough. Now that I'm older and swimming at a higher level, racing is a little bit different, but still so much fun. It is different because there is more pressure to perform than there was when I was younger, but that almost makes it more fun for me. Racing is definitely play for me.

Playing during practice is a lot more difficult for me. I have to focus and prepare for to play during a hard set or a long practice, but it isn't impossible. I think with the right mindset anything can be play.

Swimmer 17

Playing in the water as a kid was what I lived for. Since I grew up in Arizona, it was pretty warm out most of the year. This was such an advantage for me. Before I even became a swimmer, I gravitated towards the water. Every day, when I got home from school, I would run to my room, throw on a swimsuit, and head full speed into my pool. Whether I was alone or with someone, I was always playing in my pool. To a little girl who had all the time in the world, playing in that pool was what made time go slower and made me happier. Nowadays, swimming may have become more serious, but I still find time to play. As I have grown up, playing in the pool doesn't only consist of sharks and minnows, ring bubbles, or even dolphin dives, playing to me is smiling, laughing, and enjoying my sport. If I am at practice or a meet and I have smiled and laughed, then I have played. No doubt about it, swim is a difficult sport, but playing can help cope with it. Hiding emotions or hard times while swimming gets us nowhere besides stuck in our own heads. If we can learn to play often, whether that means games or just a couple smiles, then we can get through the hard times!

Swimmer 18

Most of my first experiences playing in the water came from the same neighborhood pool where I learned to swim. I can still remember the smell of the chlorine that was so poorly maintained and the way my eyes would burn once we left. Even so, every summer my grandma would take my brother and I to this tiny pool where we would spend hours diving to the bottom for toys, flipping each other off the floaties, and racing each other from one side to another. My Grandma wasn't a very confident swimmer so most times she would sit on the edge and shoot my brother and I with a squirt gun or just read her book. Honestly now, I can't imagine what I would do if I were to just "play" in the water. In my swim team years, the only games we would play were very organized and very competitive. I am a very competitive person, especially when I play on a team. So, most of the swim team games were always aggressive and very competitive but I always thought they were fun. However, that type of play is playing kinda for the sake of winning. I don't remember the last time I played just for the sake of doing so. I'm not even sure how I would do that now.

However, there is this podcast that I sometimes listen to called "Inside with Brett Hawke" and he talks with people all about what it takes to a professional athlete. There is this one episode in particular where he talks with a young woman named Annie Lazor. It's about her

recent success after taking a year off. But the one thing that she talks about that hit me the hardest is what her mantra is; "Let's see how fast I can go". My sophomore and junior year of high school I had lost my love for swimming, meets became something that I really dreaded and had a lot of anxiety around. This notion that I could let that go and challenge myself to "see how fast I could go" and not attach any expectation to race other than just trying, really opened a door for me. I was able to enjoy racing because it became fun again when I raced for the sake of racing, not for the sake of a time. That I think is the closest I can get to the feeling I used to have in that neighborhood pool.

I think you'd find this episode really interesting, here's the link ;)

Swimmer 19

When I was younger swimming was always just for fun without any pressure, it was play. I didn't care or even know what my times meant, I just did it because I loved swimming and I loved to race. As I got older, swimming started to become more like work because you had to put in the work and effort to achieve your goals. Even though it was more like work, it was still fun and play. Sometimes there are bad days that it just feels like work, most days I feel like it's a mix of both work and play. You have to be serious and focused on what you're doing in practice and competition but doesn't mean you can't have fun with it. I believe being playful with the sport does help cope with difficult times because like I said in a previous journal, swimming makes me happy when I'm having a bad day and lets me forget about any stress.

Swimmer 20

When we play, we are learning. Children use play to experience the world, just like dogs do. It is trial and error. You try something new that seems exciting and different and if that doesn't work out, you try something else until it does. Sometimes it takes longer than you expected, sometimes it's all about strategies. We play a lot in swimming. The countless amount of drills that are out there are to help your game. To help you fix small parts that lead to something bigger. Race strategies are all a form of play. Sometimes you try a new breathing technique that may work, but it may not. Sometimes you try to hold on to your energy and can never build the speed up. Because that technique did not work, you switch it up. Maybe you try to "fly and die" and see what happens. But play can change. In high school, my best 100 freestyle time was when I was actively trying to breathe every four strokes, and that

seemed to work. I have since been playing with that event to see what other things would work. Playing within a sport that although is a team sport, is also very individualized is interesting. Your body changes, your team changes, your training changes. All of these moving factors almost force you to play which can be fun, but sometimes frustrating. We are all learning along the way.

Swimmer 21

Through my years leading up to college I was on two club teams. The one when I was younger was called *Team Name* which is where my dad coached, and *Swim Club* was the team I switched to during high school. At Ladera we definitely played a lot, honestly maybe even more than worked. There were two pools at this club which we called upper(colder) and lower (much warmer). The highlights of practice were going down to the lower pool and playing sharks and minnows or my dad's game that he made up called Peter ball, and as we got in older groups, we would play keep away with a water polo ball. Sometimes we would even do a big team relay with all the groups. Even from a young age all of these games were highly competitive and honestly at times aggressive. People would come out of sharks and minnows or keep away with a scratch or two at least. But to us they were so fun, and we would do anything to play those games at the end of practices. It's interesting though because although swim was a big part of my life the games were seemingly more important than the actual practice and comparing Ladera to *former club team* it definitely had a different vibe. I really fell in love with swimming in high school yet at *team* we didn't play games as much. I think it goes to show that there needs to be a balance. At *team* we would occasionally play sharks and minnows or relays or the coach would bring us food from a new business she wanted to support. It was still fun but in a more balanced way. I would like to point out before what I say next that my goal is by no means to bash my previous university but merely for comparison about what makes swimming enjoyable and for your study purposes. It's also notable that I don't regret going there because I made a lot of great friends that I will probably have for the rest of my life gained a lot of learning. Not to mention without transferring I may have never thought of U of Idaho. At *Previous College* it was far too serious. And not even about winning but we were being treated like machines in a sense. For example, (this rule has been gone as it is against ncaa rules) they put a rule in place that if we

were even a second late, we had to swim in our clothes. This never happened to me, but I saw it happened to my friends. Some people had spare lighter clothes in their locker for this very reason. Another example, (also which has stopped due to ncaa rules) was we would consistently go over 20 hrs. a week. The coaches would frequently bring up the fact that we were d1 athletes and just needed to do what we were told but we were all so unhappy. All the fun had been sucked out of the sport. It was very upsetting to me because the sport had been such an outlet for me for so many years, but now I can see that that was just not a healthy and safe environment. Looking at these three teams there's a range of how much play was involved. I think it shows that no matter the age it can't be all work no play. And going back to the Olympian I resonated with the fact that he loved to work hard but not take it too seriously. The thing I probably learned most from *Previous College* is to not take things too seriously. Swimming is very important to me but cannot be the end all. Working hard is fun in it of itself and I was reminded of that in a lot of this week's sets.

Swimmer 22

As a kid swimming wasn't my favorite. It started out rough because my parents wanted me to love swimming since my dad was a swimmer in his younger years too. So, they had me go to practice and I always threw temper tantrums and cried until I got into the water. The part of getting into the water immediately took away my crying. Something about the way the water moved, the way I moved when in the water calmed me down and took my mind off any stressful situations. On my club team we would play the most common played game, "Sharks and Minnow's". The smiles on everyone's faces when the coaches announced we were playing that game was amazing. People were laughing, splashing, screaming of joy... I feel that being more playful in the water can help me cope with difficult times. I love being playful in the water because I am able to bring joy to some others and bring joy to myself. For example, the music that is played during practice is one of the best parts because it is able to hype me up and get me excited for the upcoming seasons. On Saturdays, I see some girls dancing, laughing, and cheering on the other swimmers that are competing. It brings me joy to see us all working as a team and having fun with a practice while also being competitive towards the other swimmers.

Swimmer 23

When people think of swimming they often think of playing, going down slides, and relaxing on hot days. But I often find myself thinking that it's work. I really have never thought of a swim practice as play before. We can play games within the practice, but swimming isn't play.

On my club team we had a rock wall, and we would race up it and then do some sprints, yes this was hard work, but it was also play because it wasn't what we usually did during practices. We also had a game called underwater torpedo and it was like a mix of soccer and ultimate frisbee. This was definitely more on the play/game side of practices and our coach was really only okay with it because we said it was helping out lung capacity, which in a sense it was.

A lot of the time swimming is focused on getting to a goal, whether it be on the clock or not. And this makes swim seem like more work than play. In my eyes play has a goal, but it is not based on your 'worth' I guess. Like play doesn't matter, but when you are faced with a clock all of a sudden that same 'game' can turn into work.

I think it would be more beneficial to think of swimming as play rather than work because work can get repetitive, and play is always fun. Because swimming is a coping mechanism (at least from school/life, but it can also be a cause of stress a lot) it would probably be better not to think of it as a job where I come to the pool to work every day, but rather a time where I can unwind and destress while having fun.

Swimmer 24

If I am going to be completely honest, I don't really have much fun "playing" games in the water, sure it is fun at first, but I am at the point where I get bored with it easily. I am very goal oriented so some of the extrinsic goals I have just adds value to what I already intrinsically get out of just swimming in general. I have fun pretty much almost every practice just because I push myself, I enjoy pushing myself. Intrinsically what I get from swimming is the escape from reality, when I dive into the pool it's like I'm in a different world. That is what is fun for me, it is fun to pick a person and just race your heart out, it is fun to just push yourself to the point of exhaustion. That stuff is fun for me because it gives me an adrenaline rush and makes me feel strong and good. The "games" don't really give me that feeling, so the games I like are racing and relays. However, it can get tricky at

times because if I am at a meet, I get the worst rush of anxiety, but as soon as I am in the water, I am still anxious but most of it gets replaced with this unexplainable rush I feel throughout my body. Sure, games can be fun at times, but I just don't get a lot out of them, I'd prefer to have a training buddy and given a hard set and feel more connected with my body than I ever do outside of the water, I get way more enjoyment out of that. Swimming is what helps me cope with difficult times, what is hard though is when swimming becomes the thing in my life that is difficult because then I do not have anything which scares me and I have been in that situation in my swimming career already and I was extremely lost, I had no escape. My place of tranquility was taken from me, now I am working back from that dark place, but I am worried about it happening again. Which I don't know if that ties into me not liking games because I have gotten this thought beaten into my head that I need validation that I am good or if it just because I don't enjoy games but either way swimming is kind of a fine line of fun and a nightmare which is risky yes but I think that makes the two sides of the spectrum more extreme which gives me a higher high when I am feeling good and sometimes I think it's worth it.

Swimmer 25

No Response

Week 5: Control

Reflection Prompt:

We began this week with a discussion about things we can and cannot control as athletes. Again, the act of floating serves as our perfect example as we need to trust that the water will be there to support us while we also control and manipulate our bodies to stay afloat. We entered into a sport, that as land mammals, we are not meant to do. Initially, swimming was a way to stay alive if one found themselves submerged in water. We therefore need to both trust and respect water. On Wednesday, we read from Aaron James' *Surfing with Sartre* to better understand a surfer's need for control and her abandonment of that control to the whims of the ocean. On Friday we briefly met in small groups to gain others perspective on their idea of control.

Think about what you can and cannot control as an athlete, woman, and individual. Describe how you feel when you are in control of your swimming, emotions, and life. Describe how

you feel when things appear to be beyond your control. Like the surfer who rides a wave, what could be the value of “acquiescing” to things outside of our control?

Swimmer 1

Control is often perceived as a good thing nor a bad thing. However, I feel comfortable when I'm in control and outside my comfort zone when I'm not in control. In swimming, I tend to over think things which really puts me in control because I tend to be too scared to go out of my comfort zone when racing and even practice. This idea of over thinking has really affected my swimming and how I view myself. I often believe I need to look a certain way to be fast rather than how I train and my mindset. I also have a tendency to think of other issues in my life when swimming which effects it immensely. All of these issues are things I can control with the right tools. I have started meditating before practice, like we talked about in our meeting earlier this week. I feel more clarity and less negativity so far from practicing this. I also have talked to my mom and told her how I feel regarding her issues. So far, she was very understanding of how it has impacted me and said she is working on it. When I am out of control, I almost feel free of my brain because I believe everything happens for a reason. In one of my best swim meets I went into it not caring about the outcome because I knew how hard I had trained and fixed my technique. I noticed that I was calm behind the blocks and even when racing, it was a great experience and I hope for more like that!

Swimmer 2

Response lost due to technical error.

Swimmer 3

Control is huge to me. I love control in many forms, the control of a stroke, the control of the water, the control of my emotions, the control of how I look or how I feel, and even the control the of outcome. I love going through each emotion and each motion in a day with some overarching control in the picture. I like routine but have learned in my short time here that spontaneous actions and the loss of control benefit me in more ways than one. I have met so many great people, on and off the swim team, that have got me out of my comfort zone and able to let go and just say go for it, what's to lose. I hope to bring this mindset over to swim because in order to blossom I have to take risks in competition like I do in practice. I am not afraid in practice because even though I can't control the outcome there is control over the feeling of failure. I can't fail in anyone's mind except my own in practice. and that's

ok with me. But I meets I let that feeling and pressure take a hold of me. I have to learn to get out of my comfort zone, and I am slowly beginning to. Whether its saying hi to a stranger or asking if I can join a game on the lawn, or asking a question, I have to learn that put the fear of the outcome aside and work with the process.

I see this all the time in my 200 backstroke. It has been a huge mental drain on me over the last couple of years. I always over think because of fear. Yet I don't know how to either except or let in the fear in order to get over it. I am not afraid to hurt, yet I am. Today was the first time in probably forever that I didn't dissect the race before I even jumped it, I just went. I didn't worry about my legs or my stroke, I just went. I actually raced and even though it hurt I wasn't slipping or straining for strength the last 50. I hope to continue building on that with this team and during competition because all I have been told was to get out of my head. Lose control. But I have to use control to get out of control and race to my best ability.

Swimmer 4

No response

Swimmer 5

I realized that I'm good at being in control of my body, like what I eat to fuel it, how it moves, stretches, etc. However, it is a constant battle for me to be in control of my head and my emotions. I have pretty delayed emotions and they just pop up out of nowhere to be honest. I'm not overly emotional in the negative sense which I find nice because when I cry or feel sad, I know that I really needed to feel that emotion. Being happy and playful when swimming is an emotion that I enjoy having control over because hearing the music and just being goofy at practice makes the whole practice more enjoyable. However, sometimes it's hard to control being happy when I don't swim how I think I can or just feel disappointed in the results after all the work I know I have put in. I try to control just trying my best and knowing that I put in the most I can. I know that I can't control the results to my races, but I try to set myself up for success and control the aspects that I can. This notion makes me feel pretty good because I know that it's scary to not know how things will work out, but I can try my best to set myself up for success. Overall, I just need to keep a strong head and try to bring some confidence into my swimming so that I can try and control the odds to be more on my side. I think it's a complicated topic to think about and some aspects overlap between me having control and it being somewhat out of my hands.

Swimmer 6

For me, I love to be in control. It makes me feel safe. When I can control how I swim in the water, that is a good sign for me. I can control the speed of how fast I swim and what I do. There are some days throughout each week where I feel completely exhausted, and I can't go as fast as I want to. That's kind of annoying but everyone has those days.

I'm a very emotional person so I like to feel like I'm content and happy all the time. I like to be in control of my emotions because if I'm not, I don't know what I'm capable of.

Sometimes I say some mean words to people and then I just feel crappy for the rest of the day. I eventually apologize and things go back to normal. It's just the little things that annoy the heck out of me. But also, sometimes I don't understand why a person does a certain thing where it makes no sense to do and that pisses me off a lot. I'm trying to work on being more forgiving to people though. I've learned that the only thing I can control are the actions that I make.

When things go wrong in my life, I feel completely out of control, and I start freaking out a lot. I cry about it, and I just feel sorry for myself and I'm so unmotivated to do anything. I need to start learning how to deal when things don't go my way, because they definitely won't always go my way. Learning to be okay when things don't go my way is a really hard thing for me to be okay with. I always try to set myself up for success and I like to plan things far in advance. But I'm trying to work on the skill of adapting to the situation that is out of my control.

Swimmer 7

My dad has coached his entire life. He was a very successful high school football coach when I was younger and has moved on to become a very successful baseball coach. I grew up with his little coaching slogans-- "toughen up", "don't be soft", etc.-- but one of his favorites was always "control what you can control". He says this saying all the time, even to this day: to my mom when she was stressed about issues with her coworkers, to my brother after he played baseball games in 110-degree heat, and to me whenever I had a tough swim race. At first, I would be upset when he said this because I wanted to be in control 24/7. I have a very hard time letting things go, even when I know it's something I have no power over, such as the weather, what the girls in the lanes next to me are doing, or my suit ripping 5 minutes before my race. Over time, however, my dad's words finally started to

make sense. I realized how much time and emotion I was investing into worrying about things out of my control and have slowly learned to let those things go. While it is still a challenge for me, I have begun to channel those emotions into my swimming. If I'm upset with how cold I am at outdoor meets, I use that anger to fuel my strokes in the water instead of complaining about it to my friends. If I'm upset with losing to the girl next to me, even when I know I should have beat her, I lean on my friends and remember the feeling of loss so I can be even more motivated to win instead of crying out of frustration. If my suit rips, I laugh about it and use that adrenaline to psych me up before my race instead of stressing about what I will wear for the rest of the day. There are so many things out of my control, but there are still those few small things I can control, including trying my best and perhaps most importantly, my mentality. Controlling my emotions during swim meets is something I have always struggled with but again, I'd like to think I'm improving. If I dwell on the past for too long, it ruins the rest of my meet. I have tried to remember my dad's saying, "control what you can control", and turn my mentality into a positive one. I repeat those words in my head before each practice, each lift, and each race. Recently, due to the pandemic, I have started saying them multiple times a day to remind myself the lack of control we all have right now, and it reminds me that while it is unfortunate, it is okay. We are all in the same boat and the only way I have been able to remain calm through it all is by leaving a lot of it up to fate and, as my dad says, controlling what I can control.

Swimmer 8

The one thing that I have learned in the last year is that You can't really control anything other than yourself, and at some points, you cannot even control yourself. I mean that when it comes to injury you often have no control over how your body reacts to certain things, how it recovers (etc.), or when you will become injured. At some times controlling your emotions can be hard, in the last few months it has become even more apparent to me that I often present myself to others as being in complete control, to my friend's and past teammates I'm always the one who is okay, with nothing wrong in my life. In doing this I bottle up my emotions and normally but eventually I explode or breakdown over something so small it should not have an effect on me. This is something that I think I need to loosen my control or at least change how to express my emotions. To be honest I think this is why not being able to swim at the very beginning of the season was so hard for me because of everything that

happened in my life in the last year that I either never accepted or dealt with properly. So, the most important thing I have learned is not to stress over things you can't control, things will be okay, and it is okay to not be okay.

Swimmer 9

Control, it's such a weird word, it has so many meanings and can be associated to many different things. To be honest, I can be a bit of a control freak, but at the same time be very go with the flow and whatever happens, happens. I have control in the water, and it's one of the only places I feel like I have control. I trust the water. I am part of the water. I work with the water. I feel safe in the water. Every time I take a stroke or a breath, I have control. I feel control every time I move my arm and grab water or kick with my legs. I can sit on the bottom of a pool or submerged in the middle of a lake or ocean and scream underwater and I still feel safe. It's so hard to explain but the water saves me, and I don't think it can ever hurt me or take away my control. Or at least not take away my control without me wanting it too, I love to lay in the water and let the water move me and feel the current push me away from shore, but that's because I trust the water. I also have control with my academics, because I am given many helping hands so I am set up to succeed and so in the end I will achieve my goals. I like to have control, back home I was always the one in charge of planning events, or dances, or plans or whatever I was in control, I knew exactly what was going to happen and that made me feel good. But if one minor thing changed my anxiety would skyrocket and I would lose control. My whole life experience has taught me a lot about control. I cannot control life; things happen that I can't change or prevent, and I have to let those things happen even though it hurts. People ask me all the time, if I could go back in time and change my past, would I? If I had that type of control part of me would do everything I could to change my past, and eliminate the pain I felt with my dad, my grandmas, my aunt, my godfather, at times I wish I could take that pain my family had to feel. But the other part of me is like well what happened if you did go back and change the past? Well for one, I have watched back to the future and many other time traveling tv and movies to know if you change to many things in the past, you could disrupt the current timeline, and I don't know if I could handle covid and dinosaurs. But also, my pain and grieving has shaped who I am as a person. It has made me stronger, and I think given me a perspective to life that a lot of my generation doesn't have. But it also makes me need control, because life is unexpected, and

that is something I learned the hard way. And it's kind of ironic if you think about it, I have experienced the curveballs of life and yet I still yearn for control and when things change it throws off my entire center of gravity. I can't control the trembles in my hands when I get stressed, or the gut wrenching feeling I get when people tell me "hey can we talk later" or "we need to talk", I sometimes can't control the negative voices circling in my head, telling me I'm not good enough, or that people don't like me, or people are talking about me behind my back. Sometimes I can control those voices and not care, but other times I wonder what I'm doing wrong and search for my control. Some people think I am a control freak, and yes, I can be at times, but control is something that makes me feel safe, I like knowing what's going to happen and have that security. So, in the end control is an interesting thing to me for I have control in some areas, while in others I feel like I have no control and that scares me. I'd rather have someone tell me how they feel about me then talk to others about me. If someone tells me they don't like me to my face I don't feel hurt or I don't really care that's how they feel about me and that's their choice, but the thought of someone talking about me to others eats me alive. Control is just a weird thing that I am still figuring out. And once again, I have no idea if this makes sense, but it does to me.

Swimmer 10

I am definitely someone who thinks they need a lot of control in their life. I've always had the mindset of being "perfect", having the perfect grades, perfect race, even the perfect personality (totally unrealistic). An old coach of mine used to say, "Until you learn how to be slow, you will never be fast". In the moment that felt like the worst advice anyone could've given me because I had just had a horrible practice, but I never stopped thinking about that. I decided that what that meant to me was that sometimes you have fail in order to learn how to win. Also, I needed to understand that sometimes you're not where you want to be in terms of swimming or school or life and most importantly sometimes you have to put yourself first. This was the first thing I thought when introduced to this week's topic because having control has nothing to do with how great someone is. I don't want to be perfect, and I think I've realized that a lot more, the older I've gotten. It's okay to have a bad day, it's okay to have a bad race or practice, it's okay to be happy! These journals have been a really nice way of talking about things that I didn't even know I felt, so thank you for helping me express myself!

Swimmer 11

When land mammals entered water, we swam to survive if we were submerged in water. Growing up, my dad lived in Trinidad for a number of years. This was because my grandfather was building pools. Many people in Caribbean countries never learn to swim because it is too scary to learn in the ocean. Therefore, my grandfather was there refurbishing and building pools for the local people, so they had the chance to swim. I found this story to be very interesting considering we swim every single day and I have never had a fear of any body of water. When it comes to swimming, we have no control over the water. We have no control over many things that happen throughout a meet. You could get sick, or perhaps you just are not feeling well in the water that day. There are so many exterior factors that we do not have control over. But the one thing we have control over is our emotion. The perspective we have towards a meet is a large factor in how you do. If we allow ourselves to fear, it has the ability to take control. My dad always quoted someone about how, the one thing to fear is fear itself. Fear is the mind killer and that is one thing that if we lose control of, will take over completely. This meet allowed us to have a chance to swim again and many things leading up to it has been out of our control. We could not control the fact that we have been out of the water in a pandemic. We have not had the choice of having a smoke week. These are all things we cannot control. However, going into this meet, with the proper mindset, we are able to have control over our emotion. There is no reason to allow ourselves to lose control over our emotions when the meet is just the beginning. Each and every person did a good job, and it is just a starting point in this season. Let ourselves control how we feel after the meet and let those emotions and thoughts be positive ones will be the best thing we can learn from this meet.

Swimmer 12

I feel happy and like I'm doing the right things when I feel like I am in control of my swimming, emotions, and my life. When these things appear beyond my control, they become overwhelming and a bit frustrating. When swimming is out of my control, I tend to just want to make it through practices. The value of "acquiescing" to the things out of my control is important because accepting the things that you need to do but don't particularly want to at that second is the way life is sometimes. Sometimes I wake up and I'm exhausted

still, but I have to accept that practice is just what I have to do. Accepting these harder times and riding the wave until things are good again is the way that it ends up going.

Swimmer 13

When I'm control of my emotions, in general, I'm more ready to take on tasks that normally would scare me. The issue is that I'm almost to never in control. The only time I'm in control is when the task is easy and I'm in a comfortable position with myself. When things are out of my control, I feel helpless and lost without direction. It makes me feel sick to my stomach. I'm not one of those people who can easily go with the flow of life. I need some sort of outline in order to have a confident outlook on the task at hand. One value would maybe be being less anxious about life and trying to take a breather and relax for once.

Swimmer 14

As a female athlete in the sport swimming, I find that it is hard to control the clock in a race and sometimes in practice. I find it hard sometimes to control my emotions and thoughts behind the blocks. No matter how many times I tell myself I'm going to do amazing there is always that thought in the back of my mind telling me I'm going to fail. What I can control is how I react to these thoughts, and I try my best to turn them into positive thoughts. When I'm going through a hard time in school or life I always try and look forward to something positive.

Swimmer 15

No response

Swimmer 16

I view control in swimming as being able to manipulate or change what I am doing, how I am doing something, or how I am feeling. Most of the time, control in swimming comes fairly easy to me. In practice I find it helpful to work on controlling my strokes and trying out new things in the water. I find that most of the control I have over the act of swimming comes during practice. I feel like I lose that control when I am racing because it can be hard for me to really focus on one thing or control my strokes as I usually just try to trust that I know my races. I think that I really give up control when I am racing, and I depend on the work that I put in during practice.

Outside of control over techniques and strokes, this topic was honestly kind of hard for me to come up with a lot of things to say or thoughts about it. I feel like control is important, but I

also don't like to think that I need to have control over swimming as a sport. When I think about control, I think about how things can also become out of control. For me, I don't think swimming is something that could become out of control, so it has been kind of difficult to think about having control over the sport in general.

Swimmer 17

Control is a funny thing to think about for each individual person. For most people, it is fair to say that they love to be in control; I am not any different. I love the feeling of knowing what is going to happen and sometimes controlling the outcome. I try my best to not think about having control when swimming; it is not always easy. I just need to learn to let the water take control and let me body move through the motions. As a woman, having control is hard in society. Women are often looked down on and thought of as less than, this makes having control more difficult. I enjoy being on an all-girls team with a male coach because us girls can look at each other as equals, and you, Mark, treat us with respect and don't look at us as less than. This means a lot to all of us girls. Over time, I have learned that in life and especially swimming, it is not always possible to be in control. Understanding this and thinking about the topic of control all week has helped me to let go a little more and accept what I have while still fighting for my own control.

Swimmer 18

A lot of the anxiety that I have surrounding swimming I think stems from the lack of control I feel when I race. It's not always like that, and actually, the best races I've had, by no surprise, I feel very much in control. However, there are times where I do get let my emotions get the best of me and let them and fear of them dictate my race.

Most of this fear, of things I couldn't control, came about when my breathing issues started. I feel like I talk about them a lot but unfortunately, they are a huge part of my struggle as a swimmer. I think that the struggle is important when discussing control because the things that someone can't control are part of the struggle and overcoming them is what makes you a better athlete. For example, a swimmer would go nowhere without the resistance from the water, while this resistance also causes drag, we still need it.

For me, the lack of control I have around certain things has forced me to become better, without them I would have never been challenged to better myself, whether that be with my breathing or my current quarantine. :)

Swimmer 19

As an athlete there are many things we can control in contributing to our success in the pool, but there are also many things we can't control. I sometimes have trouble with worrying about things that are out of my control, but this season I have really been trying to just have fun with it and let go of the pressure and I think it's been paying off already even this early in the season. Because of that, I feel more in control of my mindset towards swimming, and I can actually feel the water and it's not like I'm fighting the water every time I race. When things are beyond my control such as the covid situation, I used to stress about it, but I've learned, especially this season that you just have to go with the flow and make the best of the situation. I think the value of acquiescing things outside of your control is just knowing that I everything happens for a reason and by the end of the season everything will work out for the best.

Swimmer 20

"Control what you can control". That is what we hear day after day, but you have to work for it. I always thought that this meant to trust your training, to understand that you have done what you can for a race and now you just have to trust that. I am not there 100%, but I have realized that it is much more than that. I can control my breaths, I can control how much effort I put into my finish, and I can control my attitude about it. All of these to a certain extent, sometimes they all get the best of me. I have been trying to see the relationship between surfing and swimming. It is hard for me to do because when I am surfing, it is fairly new to me. I am comfortable in the waves and with my swimming abilities, but to have a board connected to me is a completely new experience. It is like the seven boxes that I had written about last weekend. I have overcome the fear of the water when I am swimming, so when I focus on a specific technique or start, that may take up 3 of my boxes. With surfing, I am still getting over that fear of getting hurt that just dealing with that may take up 6 boxes. With surfing, I do not have complete control yet, and that is scary. It is the same when I can control certain parts of my life, but I cannot control what others are going to do. In a race I cannot control the rest of the heat. It becomes stressful and frustrating and most of the time I get a feeling of hopelessness. I like to be in control, but I am getting better at when I am not.

Swimmer 21

It's almost funny how these topics seem to have been lining up with my weeks. This week was definitely tougher. I felt as though the practices have begun to catch up with me making me more tired and less in the moment. But the biggest challenge for me this week was missing my best friend *name. Friend* and I were roommates last year and became attached at the hip almost instantly. When I talk about how at *Previous College* I definitely made some friends that I will have for the rest of my life, she is at the top of that list. We talk every day and even facetime for hours nearly every weekend. I think with quarantine it just felt like a long summer apart from her, but this week it really hit me that we're not in a dorm 10 feet away from each other anymore. We literally did everything together and talked about anything and everything. Especially going through the experience of freshman year together our closeness is really unmatched. Frankly I have felt it be harder to become friends with the team. Everyone is very nice no doubt about it, and I am very grateful to be a part of it, but it's a team that is already very close and with corona it's a bit hard to have an opportunity to get to know everyone. I am a very outgoing person I think, but with corona I've learned that (also playing into the theme of control) the only thing I can really do to avoid being anxious in this pandemic is to control my actions. For right now I put keeping any anxieties about the pandemic low at top priority which for me means not really hanging out with people. That being said I was talking to my mom this week about it, and she said that I should suggest to *teammate* and *teammate* to study sometime since I mentioned to her that I enjoyed talking with them just from being in a lane next to each other. So, the next day I suggested it and they agreed that would be a good idea and long story short we ended up going on a picnic across the street from our apartment that night. It was really fun, and I felt like the three of us got along really well and were similar in a lot of ways, so it felt like we were having fun together and not just because we're teammates. I can't control that Jess and I are no longer going to be doing day to day activities together, but by putting that aside I was able to find that I would happen to have a lot of fun with the people in the lane next to me. It doesn't necessarily make the sadness go away but it does feel really good to feel like I'm making friends. Similarly in a swimming aspect, some of my best and most memorable races have been when I wasn't so focused or serious. They were the best because right before I was

laughing with my friends behind the block. I definitely am a person that likes to be in control, but no matter how much I may want that it is really fun to see the outcome when I am not.

Swimmer 22

When it comes to swimming, I don't like much control. For example, when my dad was coaching me as a kid, I felt more pressured and had no control of my swimming. It felt to me that he wanted me to swim the race the way he wanted, and it felt like I had no say in the way I swam. I understand he was trying to help and just be coach, but it felt different in my own perspective. When I have control over my own swimming, I am able to control my own emotions, stress/nerves and create a plan in my head of how that race is going to go.

Depending on the meet, of course, sometimes I lose control and either psych myself out or I don't create that certain plan in my head. When things are beyond my control, I choke in the race. At WAC, it was obviously my first conference meet, and I was beyond nervous.

Watching all of those parents and families above just waiting got to me. I knew, too, that this meet was wayyyy different than any high school meet I have ever been too. I let the nerves get to me and I choked in my 100 fly. I like to control my own swimming and emotions and life rather than letting someone else control the way I swim.

Swimmer 23

I often feel very out of control in the water. And a lot of the time that's a good thing.

Swimming can just take my body along and I don't have to think or over think what I'm doing. As soon as I start to over think I want to control more and more which makes me swim terrible. When I stop trying to control everything I can relax and focus on having fun swimming fast rather than swimming fast and not having fun.

In my school life I need to have control so it's kinda the opposite. I need to know when things are due, what I need to do each week, and what professors expect of me. It' was really hard in the beginning of this school year as I couldn't control anything, and it was all up in the air as to what we were doing.

A good way to look at life is you can't control anything anyone else does which helps my anxiety about the unknown go down. But while I can't control a lot of things, I do have control over my time, food, and who I am spending my time with. By controlling some few items, I keep anxiety down as I know exactly what is happening and when.

Swimmer 24

I rarely feel in control, if I do it is usually in practice, because while yes you train hard in practice, there are no expectations, you can have goals but there are no expectations. Every other aspect in my life I just feel an enormous amount of pressure, whether it be competition, school, or life, I just feel like I have all these expectations from everyone around me and the thought of not living up to those expectations just unbearable. I think that is why I get so much anxiety leading up to a race and end of the year grades because I feel like I have lost control of myself and my thoughts. It also bugs me that I cannot control how people see me, like no I don't want to control them but I feel like certain people view me a certain way whether that be a straight A student, or an athlete and I feel like I need to fulfill whatever role they put me in to satisfy them but with my old club coach he was never satisfied, so I felt out of control in a sense of nothing I did was good enough. When I feel out of control after a while whether it comes to swimming or school, I tend to shut down because I feel like there is nothing I can do except leave it up to fate and whatever happens happens which extremely unsettles me because I feel comfortable knowing what will happen and mentally prepare for what is to come.

Swimmer 25

As an athlete, woman and individual, many things are in my control, yet some things are out of my hands. Things that I can control can consist of how much effort I put into my practices or how my attitude is going into training. I can also control the amount of preparation I put into my work. This can consist of my level of training, my diet, my attention to mental skills, my game plan or competitive strategy, my technique, my competition warm-up, my pre-game routine, all the nitty-grittys. When I prepare in the right ways, this allows me to feel more confident about my abilities. Unfortunately, there are a lot of things that are out of my control; injuries, the attitudes of my teammates, whether I am on my period or not. The main thing I feel that is out of my control as an athlete is my mental state. I can't necessarily control whether or not I have a depressive episode, an anxiety attack or even a panic attack. The reason I feel that this is beyond my control is that there tend to be some triggers that send me into fear. I have narrowed down the list of physical triggers, however sometimes there are verbal triggers that I am completely unaware of. When someone says something that triggers my PTSD, I kind of go unresponsive and numb. Everything in my surroundings

disappears, and it is quite an odd feeling that is difficult to explain. I am trying my hardest to identify all these triggers, yet sometimes it is really out of my hands. I always believe that making mistakes is always a good thing. You need to learn from your mistakes to become a more mature person. When things are out of my control, it is important to embrace these things. You need to learn from this situation so that if and when this situation occurs again, you know how to handle them and bounce back stronger than ever. When you focus on the uncontrollable, you create negative emotions in your head and that can mess with you. There should always be a happy place that you go to when you happen to be stressed over things you can't control. My happy place happens to be in a field of sunflowers. Sunflowers are so cool. They're tall and they're yellow which is the happiest of colors, and they instantly throw me in a better mood.

Week 6: Flow

Reflection Prompt:

This week we began by talking about the seeming contradictions that encompass “flow” experiences. For some, time seems to speed up, for others, things appear to be in slow motion. Some people experience a heightened sense of the entirety of the experience while others have a singular vision. What is common among all these flow experiences is that we all desire to get there, and the harder we try to achieve flow, the more elusive it seems. On Wednesday your coach read from one of Bill Russell's memoirs which gave an excellent description of the eleven-time champion's experience with flow. On Friday, you got into small groups to discuss some of the common feelings we get in flow states.

Flow appears to be the perfect word for a sport like swimming. Water “flows” as it moves. When we enter the water, we have to go along with this flow. If we fight it, we are literally “swimming upstream.” Swimmers enter into and out of flow states constantly. Over the last month and a half, we have reflected on our relationship with the water. When you are “flowing” in the pool describe your being-in-the-water. Reflect on what the experience of flowing in water is like. Describe before you dive in, while your swimming, after you exit the pool. You do not need to be racing to be flowing but if flow occurs in a race describe that as well.

Swimmer 1

Just like how Russell described that flow is hard to describe, I feel the same way. I know what being in flow feels like but there are not good enough words to describe it. In my fastest distance races, I remember feeling so in flow and not even caring about the times I put up on the board. I just remember stroke after stroke and feeling like I was going faster each fifty and being so in the present. When I race, I normally am either in the past or the future so when I am in flow it is part of the reason why I love to swim distance. I have never felt flow in a five hundred or below yet because I feel like I take almost every event out like it's a thousand or a mile. However, I feel like since we are doing a lot more sprinting and faster type of swimming then I am normally geared towards I will someday achieve the flow in the non-distance events. I also used to go to yoga a couple times a week back home and it really emphasizes the idea of flow and being in the present which I believe changed my perspective on life and how I go about it. I think I am going to try to incorporate some easy yoga every week along with meditating because I think it helps with my stress and my view on the world.

Swimmer 2

Being in a flow state is every swimmer's goal especially in a race or at a meet. Feeling good in the water makes it so much easier and makes you feel like you are in control. For myself being in that state makes me feel calm and relaxed, I don't overthink anything and I am basically "one with the water". I have experienced it during races and practices many times and for me, there are different states of being inflow. One is when I just feel good in the water, my stroke feels smooth, and I don't have to put in a lot of effort, but the times don't correspond to how I am feeling. Then there is when I feel the same, but it hurts a little more, but my times are at a pace that I should be or faster.

This week, in particular, I have been in a phase of flow, I have felt really good in the water and my times have been corresponding to that, but it has not been easy. While I have been swimming this week everything around me seems to slow down. My stroke feels slow and controlled when it probably isn't and the water around me seems to be going past me slowly. There is a meet that will always stay with me because of how I felt the whole meet even on the last day. I have never felt better than that time in my life and that was long course sectionals in Mount Hood, Oregon. Before this meet I wasn't in the best place mentally with

swimming, I was considering quitting after the season because I haven't been swimming well and this would be the meet for me to decide if I want to try to swim in college or quit. My first event was the 800 free and I flew through that race, I didn't overthink the race I just went out and swam it. When I saw the time on the board I was in disbelief, I couldn't believe that I actually did that. The whole meet I was on cloud 9 and my club coach told me that he knew that this meet would be my turning point. When the meet was over, I was confident in myself and my abilities to actually talk to coaches. At this meet, it was the first time I talked to you, and was shocked that coaches actually wanted and needed me to be an asset to their team. Flow is something that I strive for, but I know I can't fight it. I have been through too many rough distance sets for me to not learn that lesson. There have been many times during sets where I'm fighting to go faster or fighting to feel good and that is the point where you will never get there. With flow, it is something that just randomly comes and when it does it is a beautiful and neat thing. Lately, I have been trying to relax and be controlled through all the fast sets, I think it has really helped me. And so far, this season you have really helped me in relaxing my mind and not overthinking if I am not going what times I want to go, taking your advice to just feel my stroke is the simplest advice but is something that has drastically helped me so far this season.

Swimmer 3

Flow to me is the connection between mind, body and water. It is when all the hard work pays off and effort feels weightless and easy. It is when I can kick off every wall with power and strength and pop up to pull another fast 25. It is when my legs can hold it together for the whole distance without tightening to the point of almost being paralyzed until the last 50. In competition I can determine from day 1 if my flow is there or if I'm going to have to fight to feel at home in a strange pool. In practice my flow comes from pushing that last distance until I feel my legs cramp and lock up. When time slows and I know the exact moment that I had pushed further than that breakpoint of the day before. I sometimes struggle with flow in competition because I never get to that point in a race that I do in practice; there isn't enough yardage. But I also can talk myself into racing in proactive most days much more efficiently than a meet. If my mind can hold out to the end of the meet sometimes my best events are on the last day in finals when everything has been so exhausted that the breaking point is no longer there. Flow is when the weight and the pressure of the competition lifts off

my shoulders and I enjoy myself. I have a lot of work to do when it comes to enjoying myself even if it's a bad day, but I have felt more flow in practice these last two months than I did all last year under the circumstances. Even leading up to the meet my brain knows what feels right and what feels wrong. I have to learn how to change my mindset and take the positive out of things even when my flow is not there, I am slowly learning each meet. I used to think that I needed a bad meet before I could have a good one. This was proved wrong two summers ago when I had the best two meets of my career only three weeks apart, that is because I had my expectations, but I swam more to my flow than to my mind. I listened to my body in a way I never had before. I was prepared and I felt like I was flying. Everything came together, and it all happened in a pool I had not enjoyed ever swimming in and without my best friends there. I found the power of attitude and how music could change my mood, calming my nerves and letting me go through the motions without exhausting my resources. Swimming is like a parabola, what goes down must come up. The water is always changing, my body and stroke are always changing, and my mind is always growing. My goal and something I've wanted to try for so long is training like a race and seeing if I can match the flow of a competition vibe in practice. No pacing, no saving up, just going because the competition is not going to wait for me to catch up in the second hundred. I want to learn how to swim ahead and not try to swim a catch-up game. The flow of this trial and error in practice has been tough, but so far has been paying off as I continue to play with my strengths and weaknesses every practice.

Swimmer 4

When I think of flow, I think of being one with the water. I think of total mental and physical interrelation with the pool. I want to say I've experienced flow several times throughout my swimming career. When I experience flow, I feel comfortable; I feel connected. I normally experience flow in the midst of a season. It is when I feel my strongest, but also my weakest. I can get through a set just fine considering the difficulty, but yet it's still mentally taxing. The mental aspect of training and flow, I've noticed, is when I get through a hard to overcome set but leaves me feeling accomplished afterward. I enjoy it when sets are hard to get through mentally. I feel like they make it easier to adapt to a flow state of mind. When I was younger, I feel like it was harder for me to achieve flow. Being that my training and meets ran off pure adrenaline and excitement for the sport. Now that I've been training and

competing for 13ish years, I've had to overcome plateauing's difficulties, which I consider to be the loss of that excitement. Flow is the mindset I've learned to accept since training in high school and college. It makes the consistency of the sport seem less intense and makes achieving success seem more obtainable.

Swimmer 5

Flowing in the water is such a magical feeling that I wait for to happen every day. When it happens to me in races, I usually can tell it's going to happen in the warmup pool. Less often do I have a great warm up and feel amazing then something just doesn't click. Don't get me wrong, I warm up the same and try my best before every race but there's that "feeling" where deep down I know I'm about to pop off. To be honest, it really mostly happens during breaststroke because when I swim that stroke it feels like such a freeing dolphin moment. So, before I dive in like for a race, I gain some sort of confidence and relaxation because I know everything will be okay. Usually when I don't get to that level in warm up, I feel nervous and unsure about things and tense up more than I should. In practice, it's a mixed bag. Sometimes I feel as though I can start the flow and have control over it somehow. The feeling makes me just feel confident and secure like a warm blanket to me. The flow is like protection, like a weapon against all bad swims. It's such a beautiful feeling to me and I think that focusing on strokes, breath control, and such only helps to lead to gaining flow. I try to focus on little things so that they build up and it's easier to get into the flow. After I race with the flow, I honestly feel so amazing and accomplished. Sometimes the flow doesn't get me my best time, but just like the man in the reading, I feel proud and just in love with the sport again. The flow honestly helps me to love and cherish this sport because it's one of the factors that inspires me to play and try my hardest. Not having flow in a race can be scary and rough so every day I always try to convince myself that I don't need to feel good to go fast, that is just a plus. Overall, flow is something I treat as very precious and it comes and goes as it pleases but I know that I can just try to keep my spirits high, my times low, and do all that I need to in order to be successful with or without it.

Swimmer 6

Go with the flow is a saying that I don't necessarily agree with. It's a good saying in some situations, but most of the time going with the flow is something that one shouldn't always do. Going with the flow while swimming sometimes works and sometimes it doesn't. Some

days when I try to go with the flow, I either end up doing really well or really terrible in the water.

Before I dive in the water, I feel pretty good because I get to talk with my friends, and I get to sit and relax. When I go with the flow and do well in the water, I feel really fast and super speedy, and I feel pretty good during the set. When I try to go with the flow and do really bad, I feel pretty sluggish and exhausted. After I'm done swimming, I feel either pretty decent or kind of sad after practice based on how I thought I did. I try to move on after that because I have a lot of other stuff in my life that I need to focus on so I can't be sad the whole day after swimming. But most of the time I feel really good to be done with practice because I try pretty hard for the most part. I don't think about flow while I'm racing.

Swimmer 7

I describe flow as a relaxed state, where everything seems to come naturally and effortlessly. This feeling occurs when I have done this task so many times that I hardly even need to think about what I am doing in that moment. Stress levels are very low, and a wave of calmness comes over me. Sometimes I experience this phenomenon while taking a test. I feel so prepared and focused that the answers come easily to me, and the test goes by in the blink of an eye, with very little stress. Sometimes I experience this phenomena when I'm at work over the summer. I pile grocery items into bags, hardly thinking about where each one goes because I have done this task for countless hours. They fit perfectly into each nook and cranny, and I can even allow my mind to wander, or talk to the guests instead of dialing in only on those groceries. Sometimes I experience this phenomena in practice. This is my favorite experience with flow, especially when I am not expecting the feeling to overcome me. I think that a majority of the time, I am so focused on trying to perfect my technique or hit a certain pace that I don't allow myself to enter the flow state. So those rare, calm moments I experience, when I feel as though I am gliding smoothly and effortlessly through the water, are nothing short of amazing. Ironically, I experienced this feeling in great detail on Monday. I'm not sure if it was because we had discussed the topic in the morning, or it was just a coincidence, but that afternoon, I dove into the water and had a great practice-- not necessarily because I was going fast or felt recovered, but because I simply felt at peace. I enjoyed the practice more than usual because of it; I felt invincible, strong, and powerful, yet light, delicate, and free at the same time. I think this is an important feeling to remember, not

just for swimming, but for many facets of life, such as in the workplace, in your relationships, or even simply cooking a meal. Although you can't always force this feeling of flow, you can try your best to at least mimic it and reap the rewards it provides feeling calm, cool, confident, and collected. The more you experience it, however, the easier I believe it is to channel whenever you desire. And in those beautiful moments when it comes unexpectedly or when you are completely aware of that state of being, you can be 100% ingrained in that moment, being one with the water, the person, or the task without even trying.

Swimmer 8

I feel like there are two different types of flow, there can be the good kind when it feels like you are fire, and everything is going perfectly right, and then there is the other kind where you just go through the motions, and it is more methodical. Like the reading, I agree that flow comes and goes very quickly and if you so much as think about it you won't achieve it. When I swim, I tie flow to a day when everything feels effortless, you can go your very best (fastest) without putting any feeling the tiredness or 'pain' that you normally would. In some cases, too your feelings can even be heightened. In terms of school flow, it more about finally having your brain completely focused on the task at hand, every part of your brain that isn't being used has been shut off. Despite all of this being said, too often in today's world we get stuck in the other type of flow, or we become too distracted to, likely by technology, achieve it. Meaning we simply go through the motions of each day, and we spot putting thought and meaning behind what we are doing.

Swimmer 9

Obviously, water flows, even if it seems still, it flows or there is movement. And flow doesn't only associate with water it goes with everything, the flow of energy, the flow of life, flow of your mood. The flow for me is something that is really important to me, because my flow of swimming is connected to my control in the pool. In the last journal I talked about how I have a need for control, and very rarely do I let go of that control, I do but it has to be the right time and right place. When I swim, I get into a rhythm, I feel the water move, I am part of the water, I feel my heart racing, I feel the flow of energy in the water and in my body. But what happens to me when something changes? When even the smallest detail changes, then my whole flow is thrown off. If it's my mood, my coach, my team or

something out of my control, my whole flow just crumbles, and that is something that really ruins me. Even outside of the pool, I have a flow to life and when something changes it scares me and I get really worked up for no reason and it's kinda hard for me to control and it takes me a bit to relax. I think my flow is connected to my control, and they are basically the same thing, and when I lose control, or feeling of going with the flow then I hole up and freak out. Bottom line, I have a lot to learn about myself, my inner chi, my control and my flow. Because I am very in touch with myself, my chi and my environment, it's weird but I can really feel the flow and energy. But sometimes my need for control overtakes my flow and that is something I need to learn, kind of like when to let go and when to control.

Swimmer 10

Sorry it took me so long to write to you today, I was not in flow. Anyways, there have been very few times that I have felt like I was actually in flow. Every time I felt like I was getting close to it, I would change teams. One race I remember quite vividly was a 200 freestyle at Washington Open. I don't swim freestyle very often especially the 200 so I didn't really know how to swim the race nor was there much pressure behind the race. I dropped 5 seconds and went under 2:00 for the first time. I didn't even feel like I was breathing that hard because I was just focused on having fun instead of getting so worked up about the race. I also think that race is what helped me realized that I shouldn't take things SO seriously. I like to have a race plan, but I also know in order to compete how I want to I have to be smiling and understand that I have prepared in all ways possible so whatever happens, happens.

Swimmer 11

The way one would describe water is its ability to flow. When we swim, we are flowing with the water, but there are days in which we are swimming upstream. Those days of upstream swimming become physically and mentally exhausting. The water feels like it is working against you, and no matter what you try to do, you just cannot get to the other end quickly. At our level in this sport, although time is not everything, it is a great deal. The times you see on the clock when you aren't flowing really diminish your self-esteem and you get down on yourself. By the end of the practice, you have given everything to reconnect with the water and establish the flow; however, failed epically (normally) and you just feel defeated. On days in which flow is established, it may not mean you are swimming best times. You are just completely immersed in the water and in have allowed joy to take over. Time exits the

mind and the sense of just feeling good takes over. When we achieve flow, we have allowed our mind to extend deeper into the actions we are performing and allowed our minds to rest in a simple state as our body works to achieve greatness.

When I achieve flow, my understanding and sense of doing is heightened. I can pinpoint the race I have felt like I was in complete flow, and I can tell you exactly the number of strokes I took on each length. I know this not because I was counting, but rather the inner doings of my body was clear. You feel connected to element you are in. It felt like each stroke, my hand was tied to the water as in moved through it, gliding and pushing together as one. I believe that you can achieve moments in which you are in half-flow where you feel great, but the serenity is not complete. When being in flow, I have energized my focus, there is power behind each movement and stroke, each and every skin cell can sense the pool water. I do not think I know when I am in flow prior to diving in the pool. There is no guarantee when it comes to having flow in the water prior to swimming as the harder you try to achieve flow, the farther away it gets. I think looking back prior to diving in before flow my mental state was just in a positive manner. I do believe I was focused on the race, my desire to do well was there and the confidence behind my training was there. I was just ready, but not over-thinking the race. After achieving that flow, I just felt content. You don't fully understand what you just went through. I knew what I have done and achieved but you still just don't understand. In essence, flow is a something many try to achieve, and although is sometimes rarely achieved it can be a reward in itself.

Swimmer 12

Every so often I get that "flow" feeling when I'm in the water. Before I dive in, I cannot tell if I am going to feel the flow or not when I dive in. The only way to tell is to test it out by getting in the water. As soon as I hit the water, I can usually tell if the flow is there because swimming just seems so smooth and easy while still going fast. When I am in flow, I eat up the sets and absolutely adore them because I feel fantastic. After I exit the pool, I am just happy, and I feel like I could do anything. It's a strange feeling because I start thinking "oh if I feel like this all the time, I could go this time..." and get ahead of myself that way. Flow brings a sort of excitement into my veins. When I am in flow when I race, I am so much more confident. I usually can tell exactly how the race is going to go beforehand and especially in flow. I remember freshman year as I was warming up for the 200 fly at Husky, I

looked at my boyfriend at the time and I told him "Hey watch this I bet I'll get a best time". I ended up getting a best time. My body and muscles can still hurt while in flow, but it doesn't seem to make as big of a difference. Everything feels very natural and like I was meant to swim in those moments. It seems to be completely random though so I can never tell when another one will come. I think that I only feel the flow feeling once every month. If I'm extra tired during the school year, I will only feel it once every two months ish.

Swimmer 13

No response

Swimmer 14

I personally don't feel like I've ever been in a flow state in a race. I never throughout my 4 years of high school swimming club and high school felt like I've had a really good lead up to taper to fully get that "flow" taper and meet. I may have been in that state when I was younger but was most likely not aware of me being in flow state. I know that might sound bad to say but I was never really motivated on club because I felt like I wasn't being pushed or watched by my coach. It makes me very hopeful coming here though and working hard in the pool in hopes to when we do compete one day to hopefully achieve that "flow" state. I do, however, feel as if I've had the occasional practices of being in flow and having it feel so incredibly smooth and it honestly is one of the best feelings when everything just clicks. I wish so badly to achieve that feeling, that state, in a race someday.

Swimmer 15

When relating flow to swimming, personally I think of being "calm". I know that practices are going to be difficult as always, so it helps that I keep myself calm. Over thinking and worries lead me to have panic attacks, which also leads to shortness of breath. Flow comes in in this situation because it is a practice of mentality for me. Ways I keep myself calm is focusing on stroke technique or even singing the same song on repeat that's been going through my mind throughout the week and keep up with the tempo with that song, since I'm more of an upbeat music kind of gal. Even adapting to changes is considered a flow to me. Especially with COVID-19 that has changed our lifestyle now and we have to adapt to it. It's certainly difficult in the beginning because with such a small pool and about 30 girls, social distancing is tough. But as we figure out ways to make changes and not affect our efforts in the pool, this is our lifestyle now until everything is back to normal. During practice, I even

noticed that I haven't been talking to my teammates in the pool during sets because I tend to get in the "zone" throughout the set. Sometimes when my teammates talk to me, it's funny how I reply to them after the set, and they don't remember what we were talking about in the beginning. I guess I'm a swimmer who's not a fan of being distracted during the sets.

Swimmer 16

Being in flow is something that I always look for when I am swimming. Being in flow is great and makes racing and practicing more enjoyable. Being in flow during practice is a lot harder for me to obtain and a lot more infrequent, but when it happens it is great. Being in flow during practice makes time go by faster, my strokes feel better, and makes my attitude a lot better. I think flow is more difficult to attain in practice because practice is something that is much harder for me. I feel as if I am in flow nearly every time I race. Racing is something that is so fun and cool for me that flow comes very easily. Flow makes time go by much faster and no thoughts really go through my head at all. I don't think about who is next to me, how I am feeling, or any specific techniques that I had planned out for the race.

I think that I may think too hard about enjoying and working hard during practice trying to obtain flow. I think that if I took my racing mindset and used parts of that during practice, flow would be much easier to achieve.

Swimmer 17

Flowing in the water is a state of calmness that most people can't comprehend. It's as if everything lines up perfectly. Your body, mind, and the water all match. Flow does not come easy or naturally though. When I feel good and know I am in flow, I know that isn't just naturally happening. I had to [have] worked hard the day before or even months and years before to hit that flow state. While in flow, it may not feel like I am working for it but at some point, I was. Before diving in, flow is all a state of mind. When swimming, flow feels like I am gliding through the water with all the time in the world. After exiting the pool, it is that breathe of relief that flows out. Swimming is not always a flow sport, but it has experiences of flow. With or without flow, my relationship with swim is strong because I know I work hard for that future flow.

Swimmer 18

For me, flowing is being present while swimming. It's very easy in our sport to get distracted and start thinking about things that don't pertain to swimming. I flow when I think about

exactly what I am doing at the moment, how my hand enters and exits the water, my body position, and head position. Instead of thinking about homework or how hard I think the next set is going to be. When I do the best, I can at that moment, as if it were the only set I was doing that day I do much better, I flow. It is very similar to my play, in that, when I am flowing with the water, I am having fun. I had a good set today, flowing with the water and I had a really good time, even caught myself smiling while I swam.

Swimmer 19

When I'm in a flow state in the water I feel like time goes by so much faster. I feel like I'm swimming so fast but not having to try as hard to get speed. It's almost an effortless feeling that you just feel the water without having to fight it. Like I said in my last journal, sometimes when I think too much or try and control things that are out of my control, I end up fighting the water. I feel like this season, especially my freestyle, I have been able to get more into a flow state because I've been trying to just feel the water. I feel like the initial feeling of diving in the water I can instantly feel the water or fight it and then throughout practice I constantly try to loosen up to get to the flow state without trying too hard or think too much about getting there. In addition, I feel like when I am in a flow state at practice my stroke is a lot longer and more stretched out so in a way, I am holding more water as well. At meets I sometimes overthink my races so to get into a flow state for a race I have to just have fun and distract myself before getting on the blocks and then just trust myself and the water to get to a flow state.

Swimmer 20

Flow to me is when things seem almost effortless. It is easy to swim fast, your muscles feel good, you're in a good mood, everything seems to be adding up. This could happen rarely for some people and often for others. When it does happen to me, I feel unstoppable. I'm in a good mood and that is when I remember why I have stuck with the sport for so long. I thought it was interesting how in the reading for this week, the author talked about how he needed everyone around him to be in a flow state for him to be. I relate to that in some ways, such as having everyone in a good mood and in a grind together motivates you and allows you to also get to that point. But on the other hand, every time that I have swam a best time in an event, it has been when I was way ahead of everyone else in my heat. It was almost as if I had no competitors. This again made me feel unstoppable. I believe that one of the

coolest things about being in flow is it is almost easier to lift other people up and cheer them on because you are not so focused and frustrated with yourself.

Swimmer 21

I've never necessarily put the word flow to it, but that is easily my favorite part about swimming. Aside from the other great aspects like team and the friendships that come from it, flow is completely mine. Quarantine was an interesting time, and it gave me a lot of time to recover and reflect on what I have just come from and where I wanted to go. Somehow during that time, I stumbled across some videos that talked about the law of attraction. It maybe sounds cheesy but it's something that resonated with me. Essentially, it's a concept that says you attract what you put out and think about. I like it because it doesn't really have any religious affiliation but adds a really positive and encouraging perspective on life that you can make your own. I mention this because it can even relate to how I may look at a practice in the future. If all I think about for the coming morning practice that it's going to be bad or hard likely that will be what comes of it. Not to say that I have to have a perfect attitude everyday but little things like that add up over time making harder to get to a flow state. I think flow stems a lot from balance. If my sleep schedule is totally messed up, then it's going to be a lot harder to have a good attitude about the practice to come. But if I have a balanced week then I am much more likely to be able to take advantage of practices. That being said sometimes you can do everything right and still not feel great in the water. Similarly, you can't force always being positive, that's not healthy either. But I think the best way to handle those times when things aren't lining up is to be grateful for what has happened and what's to come. I don't like being out of flow, but I can probably learn more in those situations than when I am in it. It gives you something to appreciate and something to look forward to. The feeling of working hard yet feeling like you could go forever is like none other and is something that makes people love sports. Whether is playing or just watching to be immersed in your sport can be such an exciting state of adrenaline that making things feel awesome when it's easy and balanced.

Swimmer 22

My experience of "flow" feels different every single day I am in the water or out of the water. Some days it feels harder to move through the water and other days I feel like the water moves past me at lightning speed. For me, to be specific, it depends on what I eat

before practice or a meet. If I don't get the certain nutrients needed for me to swim or have energy, I will notice it is harder to get up and go fast in a practice or meet. I also notice it depends on how stressful that week is because if its midterms week or even a week where I feel off, practices will feel sluggish, and my body feels drained of its energy to go fast or feel motivated. Then there are those times where I do eat well, and I am not stressed, and those practices feel fun, easy, exciting, full of joy...etc. And when I feel good during those practices, I feel motivated and full of energy and feel the need to push the other swimmers next to me during practice. Before I dive in, I think "what is my goal for this practice?" This past week I have been focusing on certain things like my pull or under water kicks. I have noticed that focusing on certain things during the practice has made the flow easier and has also given me a challenge as what to work on next. While I am swimming, I focus on the flow of my arms pulling the water past me and making sure it feels good for me. After I exit the pool, I feel the water fall off my body and drip from my hair. I can feel the flow of the breaths I am taking as they begin to slow down and calm to a steady heart rate. Flow is not always consistent and has its days where it feels good or bad...

Swimmer 23

Flow is really hard to achieve, it can't be forced and the more you want it the harder it is to get. And once you do have it, it can be lost after one 50. It is a mental as well as a physical state. If I keep thinking how bad I hurt and how slow I am going there is a 0% chance I am going to reach the optimal flow. Almost every time I am in flow nothing else matters in the world and I don't feel any sort of soreness, pain, or any other physical type of exhaustion. And if I do it doesn't matter and doesn't really set in until after the race or practice.

Often when I am swimming I either am in flow, being a dead brick, or just going through the motions thoughtless and powerless.

Being in flow is kinda random, there are some things you can do to create a higher chance to get into flow, but nothing is guaranteed. In high school I could almost force myself into flow by swimming countless yards until I felt good. Not so much anymore. I can eat well, get a good night's sleep, and mentally be prepared, and still feel like a dead brick sometimes.

There isn't a set system.

I was just talking with the counselor I started seeing, and when I hyperfixate on things she described it as flow, and we connected it back to swimming too. In both nothing else matters

except the task that I am on currently. I just thought it was interesting to see the connection between swimming and out of the water life too.

Swimmer 24

To me, I seem to get into flow more commonly at practice than I do meets, and I don't know if it's because of nerves or if because there are more opportunities to be in flow during practice, but I am in it more often at practice. For me when I am in flow, I don't seem to feel pain as much, sure I feel like when I'm doing 100's or 150's and the adrenaline wears off but oddly enough, when I am in the flow state, pain doesn't seem to faze me, instead it seems to fuel me and make me push harder. It feels like the water and I are connected, like we are one with each other, like we fit perfectly with one another. When I am in flow, I don't feel like I am working as hard, like the water is pushing me along. I can recall one moment in my time swimming being in flow at a meet. I was 13 or 14 and about to swim the 100 breast and my coach told me what she wanted my splits to be. To me it was a crazy idea because they were fast, and I was so nervous. However, my friends were behind the block with me and also made a game plan with me that when it the clock hit 1:10 (it was during long course) they would start screaming "REACH" instead of go because we all knew when I got tired I tended to shorten my stroke and stop pulling water; even though I was nervous deep down I had trust in my coach but also trust in the water. My first 50 was amazing, it felt powerful and effortless, however about half way into my second 50 I sneakily peaked around and no one was around me I didn't know what the think, I just kept going and kept flowing, by the last 15 meters the pain really set into my legs and arms but I heard my friends yelling at me to reach and so that's what I did. I reached and ended up going a best time by a second and a half. Now when I am out of the water, I can tell it's going to be a good practice when I look out into the pool and the rest of my surroundings fade away to where I can only see the water, and I feel like its calling me.

Swimmer 25

To me, the word flow has never passed my mind when thinking of it in a swimming context. When I think of flow, I automatically think of yoga. My mom and I used to do a yoga class called 'flow' and I remember just really enjoying myself. The instructor was amazing too. We went once a week every Sunday, and I remember, at the start of every class, she would ask us to choose a word for the week. The word could be anything, but this specific word that

you chose would impact your week. Then when we went to class the following week, she would ask us to take time to reflect as to whether or not that word impacted us that week. I still do this, even 5 years later. I write down my word for the week in my agenda every Sunday morning, and I use that word to guide me through the week. The word of this week is 'envision'. With the ISL going on, it is quite fun to watch, even though I still don't understand how it fully works. I think that for this week, I chose the word 'envision' because I really am excited to get back to racing. I envision myself at conferences hopefully making a podium. Hopefully my word for this week will allow me to work hard during practice in order for me to reach my goals. Now when I think of flow in terms of a swimming context, I think of flowing in the water is a feeling of when I totally zone out. Not because I am tired, but the water and I sort of connect in a way, and we become one. Flow tends to happen when I am doing a long-distance swim / pull set. I love pull sets, especially long and boring pull sets by the way. It is almost as if my body disassociates from my brain. Long sets tend to allow my body to get into a rhythm, and my mind wanders off. I become Completely involved in what I am doing – focused, concentrated. That is my take of the flow of water. Prior to diving in, I would think of the term flow with how the vibe is before I enter. This being the social aspect around me. Are my teammates in a positive and happy mood, is my coach grumpy for whatever reason. I believe that the flow is the flow of energy, whether it is positive or negative from my teammates and coaches. I don't think flow occurs in races. Like I describe before, flow to me is an out of body experience. That can't really happen in races or else I would know sharp focus during the race. Racing is so different than training. There is a different mentality; the pre-race jitters, the attention to detail, the euphoric state of doing well after. There is a sense of concentration, but it is a different type than in practice. Flow is such an interesting concept, and I think it is quite useful to be able to understand and harness the concept in a swimming world.

Week 7: Sweet Tension of Uncertainty

Reflection Prompt:

This week we discussed that one of the most primal components to sport is the uncertainty that is an essential to the tension of the contest. We enter the arena, the court, or in our case the pool, not knowing how things are going to turn out. This can be both exciting and scary

at the same time. Referred to as the “sweet tension of uncertainty,” the unknown of sport is what calls us back to the activity and creates anxiety if left alone to fester (Kretchmar, 1994). This week we began by looking out into the abyss of the unknown and discussing how our fears are part of the journey of an examined life. On Wednesday, we read excerpts from Jim Wharton’s *Long Run* to peer inside someone’s intimate and often scary experience with his sport. On Friday, each of you wrote one thing concerning the unknown that your coach then read to the rest of the team to illustrate that you are not alone in your uncertainty.

It is said that you cannot step into the same river twice because it is always changing. Look inside your unknown with swimming and describe how that sweet tension can be a positive force moving you forward toward learning more about yourself.

Swimmer 1

Swimming has been around most of my life and it is where I found my best friends, most of my identity, sometimes how I value myself, and an escape in my life. When I was 7 years old, I'm sure I didn't realize how swimming would impact my life when I started but I just knew I loved swimming and being in the water. From being in the water so much I find it fascinating that every day is different in the same pool by how you feel. Some days the water slips through my pull and I feel like I'm swimming in place, some days I feel really strong in the water and muscle through every stroke, and my favorite days when each stroke feels so effortless but at the same time, I feel fast. There are also days where I am constantly fixated on the times I go in each set and days where I only really care about how I feel in the water. When I get to a meet though, it seems like everything I feel in the water sometimes flies out the window and I only care about trying to swim fast. It's almost like a panic and forget how important the movements in the water are compared to how fast I mentally want to go. However, I feel like rather than being fixated on going fast and going a certain [time] to enjoy the idea of the sweet tension of uncertainty.

Swimmer 2

Throughout most of my swimming career "the sweet tension of uncertainty" was not a positive thing for me because I was always stressed out by the end result. I am trying to veer away from that mentality, but it is a process and I think it is getting better. In my opinion, this tension before we compete is because of all the hours we have put into training and how many hard sets we have done leading up to this. Most of us have had good practices

that lift up our confidence and we start to think of how fast we can go in a race that we are training for. I have gone into races knowing how I want to swim and already have a certain time I want to go in my head. I have learned over the years that this is not the best thing for me to do because that sets an expectation for the race making me somewhat stressed and if I don't meet that goal my confidence level goes down. I now go into a race with no expectations and just swim for me and whatever happens, happens. Mentally I am still trying to not beat myself up after a race, but these intrasquad meets have helped me tremendously because they are no stress meets and all my teammates are behind me cheering me on no matter how I swim. Even at an actual meet, I know that I will always have them in my corner, and I need to start looking at myself the way they see me.

After talking in groups, a couple of people mentioned that their parents can tell if they are going to have a good race or not, and to me that is interesting. My parents have mentioned this before but that have said over the years that it has changed and now they can't really tell till I start swimming. If I seem like I am fighting the water and muscling through it, they know that it is not going to be the best race. But when I seem to be flowing and looking smooth in the water, they know that it will be a good race and possibly a good time on the board as well. Other people said that their parents notice little things like yawning before a race or being really quiet. Everyone has little things they do before a race that could put off energy about a good or bad race but at that point, things are still uncertain. I could be in the right headspace and be fully confident in a certain race and it could be the worst race of my life. That is the thing about any sport, you never know what is going to happen on competition day. You just have to trust that you have put in the time and effort into that sport to come out with a good result.

This topic of the week is a hard one for me and is something that has impacted my swimming in a negative way most of my life but now it is something that I am coming to accept and is becoming a part of my swimming.

Swimmer 3

Uncertainty is such a huge obstacle for me. I definite like control, but with timed sports come uncertainty. Whether it be a slip on a start, a bad wall, an off breath, or just the feeling of defeat during a race. Uncertainty is everywhere in the sport of swimming. There is no ownership on a time, or psychic ability to understand what is going to happen in the next

minute. One quote that comes to mind when I think of uncertainty is " yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, right now is a gift, that is why we call it the present." I definably have a mental block with uncertainty in meets that I am trying to desperately overcome, relearning where effort needs to be presented and where I need to let things go. My hope is that college is different because club was always a competition. With our top grouping being so large it was always a competition for coach acknowledgment, lane places, and the interval you were on. This defiantly is the root of my mental block because if you didn't have a great meet your lane spot may be moved down a certain amount of people or maybe a whole lane in general. This was terrifying for me because I love to please, whether it be a parent, coach, or peer. I couldn't stand the idea of being moved down a lane or losing my lead spot because I was not training well enough to swim well at a meet. I know this is not true now, but club swimming was much more of an individual mindset then team mindset. There was the aspect of shared suffering because it was more for individual gain and that's what got to my head. I held myself to expectations that could not be met unless I had the meet of my life, and it wasn't healthy. This cycle continued because of the fear and uncertainty about the results of a meet. Trying to learn why I swam much more efficient and even faster in practice, tired, and in a practice suit then I did in a meet. Why I could push a faster 50 back then I could race one. This last year was the hardest year yet for me when it came to the uncertainty and pressure overwhelming me. But I not have more to look at, college swimming is a team sport that involves more than just individual races. I am hoping this new environment helps me except the uncertainty and compete at my best ability while still having fun. Accepting the good with the bad

Swimmer 4

When I reflect on my experience as a swimmer and the risks I've taken throughout my career, I mainly reflect when I was in high school. While living in California, I swam on a club team that didn't have a very rigorous practice schedule. Being said, I added a lot of time in my junior year and was often unmotivated to keep trying at the sport. When I was at my lowest point, I decided I needed to take some risks and be creative if I ever wanted to achieve my goal of swimming in college. I was never a big runner during my time as an age group swimmer, but I decided to incorporate cross-training into my schedule in high school. I was a dual-sport athlete during my senior year, is that I ran cross country and swam. I found a

hidden love for the sport of running and developed sincere respect for runners. It was difficult for me to join the cross-country team, as I hadn't run competitively since middle school. The decision was significant because my coaches and parents always told me to run the risk of injury and lose my shot at swimming in college if an accident happened. I took the chance anyway, and senior year I was the first female swimmer to ever qualify for the California state swimming championship. My season ended with a 2nd and 3rd place finish at CIF and a plaque with my name and "swimmer of the year" engraved on it. I genuinely believe that if I hadn't joined the cross-country team, I wouldn't have this success story to tell.

Swimmer 5

The sweet tension of uncertainty can help me to feel much more positive about my races. Instead of dwelling on how I feel like whether I'm sore or don't feel good, I can instead start to think about all the good possibilities of my races. I need to work on not dwelling on vibes, like if the weather isn't the best or how my other teammates are feeling. Instead, I need to help myself realize that the "sweet tension" is always exciting, and I should be grateful that I get the opportunity to grow and try my best every day. At the meet today, a prime example was me being super nervous before the 200 breast because I have not raced that event in so many months. I'm glad I got the feel of it again and I thought it was a pretty good baseline despite my fears and soreness. On my start, I had a bad dive and for a couple seconds I was negative about it and beat myself up. Then I tried to get out of that mindset because I realized that there's always uncertainty. There's so many factors for uncertainty like my next stroke, my next turn, my next breakout, etc. So, by realizing this notion, I can see that the unknown should be more exciting and riveting versus being scary and something to stress about. I need to learn to go with the flow more and really trust myself and my skills. Overall, the sweet tension of uncertainty is a positive aspect because it helps me to learn that hard work pays off.

Swimmer 6

Being unaware of the future is scary. There are so many possibilities and that can be overwhelming. With swimming, there seems like there could be unknown with racing. For example, training all year long for an event but instead of dropping time, you add or get

disqualified in it. That can be really discouraging. Or another example with school is studying a lot for an exam but still not getting the grade you wanted.

I don't like the unknown, I've always hated it. I feel safer when I know what's about to happen next. For example, sometimes when I'm watching a show, I'll look up the plot or type a question, so I know what's about to happen next.

I guess with swimming it's really intimidating not knowing what's going to happen next. Especially with this season, it's definitely scary not knowing whether the season will continue or not or if we will have conference in the future. I'm still trying to have a positive outlook but it's hard to do when there is so much that is unknown in the future.

Swimmer 7

As I have stated before, I am someone who likes to be in control and know what's going to happen in any given situation. I can typically adapt pretty well if neither of these things are present, but if I had the choice, I would choose to be informed and as prepared as possible at all times. Swimming, however, has taught me that it's okay to be uninformed or unprepared. There are so many unpredictable circumstances that can arise in this sport, and sometimes no matter how hard you train, how focused you are, or how confident you are in yourself and your team, things can go wrong. And honestly, those are some of the times where I have performed my best. For instance, my very first travel meet after moving up to the highest level group on my club team as a freshman in high school, I went into the meet feeling very uneasy. We had been training harder than I ever had before, and I had no idea if my body was adjusted or if I was ready to compete at a higher level. As I stepped on the block for my first race of the three-day meet-- the 50 freestyle-- the sweet tension of uncertainty truly washed over me. I remember bending down to take my mark, staring at the water I was about to dive into and wondering what would happen. Then the starter went off and I quite literally launched myself towards that uncertain outcome. The race itself is a blur, but I remember the feeling of happiness I felt afterwards as I looked up at the board and saw I had gone a best time. This feeling stuck with me for the remainder of the meet and was arguably my best swim meet I ever had. It was then I realized that uncertainty can be your best friend, not always your worst enemy. I had spent the entirety of my life trying to find control or catch a glimpse into the future, but that was the first time I can remember embracing that uncertainty and it worked extremely well for me. Since then, I have tried to

not cower in fear of the unknown; instead, I have tried to have faith in the unknown, and know that even if the outcome isn't necessarily something I want, it will help me grow regardless. COVID has been a great example of this. Of course, I wish to soon travel with my team for swim meets, or meet new people face-to-face in my classes, or become confident that the virus will be taken care of soon, but none of these things are certain, and swimming has allowed me to see that this is okay. I have still had a wonderful time with my friends and teammates, been lucky enough to not have had any of my loved ones become sick, and even been able to compete in the sport I love. While it might not be something I enjoy, not knowing what's coming next is something I can not only handle but use to guide me to success.

Swimmer 8

I feel like this topic goes very close in line with last week's topic about control and that we need to release some control. In athletics, everything is unknown which is what makes it so exciting and is also what brings make people enjoy sporting events so much. However, in my mind, the quote about the sweetness of uncertainly is profound because when you swim there is no limit to how fast you can go. In other words, the time or place you are seeded with on the heat sheet does not dictate what time you are going to go, meaning you could go way faster than everyone expects, or the underdog could upset the first seed. So, in conclusion no one really knows what is going to happen until the whistle blows or you finish to the wall, and it is this uncertainty that pulls everyone to sport and competition.

Swimmer 9

What is the meaning of life? Now this is a very interesting question. To start what is the meaning of life or my life. As I have mentioned before I like planning and I like having control it makes me feel safe. But I have had to learn the hard way that life is unexpected, and it can change within a matter of seconds. Most people try to live their life knowing what is going to happen in their future like having a good job and a family or whatever they want their future to look like, but there is always that blanket of uncertainty hiding in the back of our minds waiting to come out. Sometimes that uncertainty can be bad but also be good. For my life and swimming, uncertainty scares me. A lot of my stress and anxiety stems from this uncertainty, possibly because I doubt myself and abilities so I don't trust my gut and I build up anxiety so in the end it does a lot of damage, but I've also just learned that life sucks

sometimes and will come and hit you at the most unexpected times. Therefore, I try to maintain control for my sanity, but very rarely have I just let go and just let whatever happens happen. I'm learning on how to handle my control if that makes sense, you once mentioned that the best way to regain control is to let go of it and let the world unfold on its own. And it's not easy for me haha, but I have been slowly letting go, and just trusting myself and the world and letting go of the need for control. Over these past few months I have been a little spontaneous, like randomly getting ice cream in the middle of the night, or walking to the store with *teammate* at 11 at night, or to stop forcing my control in the water and just trust the water and trust the uncertainty, and honestly when I let go I can see and feel a difference in my swimming, I swim better and with more confidence. So, although uncertainty is terrifying and it builds that tension, sometimes I just have to trust it and let life happen, because I cannot control life, I can influence it and have opinions and out my life on a certain path, but everything happens for a reason. All I can do is live my life to the fullest, fill it with love, laughter, family, and swimming, that is the meaning of my life right now, and I hope it is like that forever maybe add a few more reasons, but there will be times that the uncertainty will be negative, but I know I will be ok in the end because I am learning to trust myself, the water and the world, and I have the support of my loved ones and friends.

Swimmer 10

I think the older I get the more I feel okay with the uncertainties of life. I've learned that, at the end of the day, I've done what I can to prepare for things, so I have to just believe in myself and hope for the best. I am also much more of a team swimmer than an individual swimmer. I will do anything and everything for the team. Uncertainty doesn't scare me but disappointing the team does. When I was younger, I would work myself up for everything and that's why people thought I had my heart thing, because I was anxious and nervous when my heart rate would skyrocket. In my entire swimming career, I've never cried after one of my races, but I like to think that I am a lot more relaxed before swimming my races now. Moving to this team has made me love the sport so much more than I realized and not just because of my amazing teammates and coach, but because of the fact that I can be myself in the water. I can swim without so much stress and control. I like to set goals and I even put the 400 IM and 200 back record time all over my phone and journal. I want certain things in life, and I will work to get there, but I also know it isn't the end of the world if I have a bad race.

Swimmer 11

Each and every time we enter the water it is different. We never know what set we will be doing or the way we will be feeling. From last week's topic we talked about flow and how when you work to achieve flow, it becomes harder to grasp. This shows that the moments when we will be in flow is unknown. Although the unknown is scary, it only affects one's mind when we allow it to fester. Neglecting to embrace the tension that arises between the unknowns and yourself will only leave you worse off.

The world in which we currently live in is full of unknown. As I sat at home during the pandemic, I had no way of knowing if I would even be allowed to enter the United States. I did not know if I would be having a season this year, or when I was going to be allowed in the pool. When you do not know, it can become frustrating, but it also made me realize that it is not my time to walk away from swimming. I was missing it and was ready to get back into training. I wanted to be back in Idaho, and with my team which reassured me that I made the right choice for college. Without this unknown time, I would not be able to see the things that I wanted to know.

When it comes to racing, you never know what is going to happen. Things are constantly changing-- not only day to day, but also race to race and even stroke to stroke. We are human and full of imperfections, and although our ultimate goal is to find our limit, that limit changes frequently. I am one to never state the outcome of a race prior to swimming it. Sure, I may know who I am supposed to beat or the time I am supposed to go around and although confidence is good, the fool you make of yourself when you are wrong is much worse than just settling with the unknown. With swimming you have a goal, you know which path you ideally want to take to get there but the uncertainty is what makes the journey worth it. When climbing a mountain, the summit will be the summit no matter what. It does not move. It does not change. Your dream is the summit. It is there, and although can alter slightly, it is still in your mind. That is important is the focus you put on the path you are taking to the summit, one step at a time. You cannot reach the top when that is your only focus. Look at the uncertainty as an obstacle, something you can overcome, build you are a person, and also launch you closer to your goal. If you refuse to embrace the uncertainty, you will be unable to adapt. The results we see from a meet varies all the time, but if we crush all unknowns, we hinder our ability to achieve flow and kill the ability to enjoy the journey.

Swimmer 12

No response

Swimmer 13

I feel as if when I'm not expecting something, my outcome is a lot more positive and what I want, however when I do really really REALLY want something to happen, it doesn't exist in my reality. It can go for swimming or for basic things that happen in life like, getting a good grade on a test or wanting someone to like you back. Things, at least for me, don't happen when I expect them to. It's been like that for pretty much my whole life. The sweet tension of uncertainty is something that's scary yet beautiful at the same time, you have to balance everything on a tiny stick and hope to God you don't drop it. It's the reason I have a lot of anxiety in everything that's unknown, it's scary but it's the beauty of it all.

Swimmer 14

For me the sweet tension of unknown certainty whether in the pool or life in general is liberating yet scary at the same time. Living everyday with a fresh start is exciting, it keeps things new. However, that unknown leaves a lot of space for anxiety to build up. For instance, in a race or meet day I have no idea what is going to happen, I hope to swim to my full capability but there is always that unknown or "what if" that pops in your head. I wrote about in a previous journal entry that I love being in control. I think working on enjoying the liberating/exciting parts of the unknown certainty will eventually help correlate to not focusing on the scary/anxiety feelings of the unknown.

Swimmer 15

My dad and I had a talk about preparing for an exam that I had to take soon. Back then, my dad was a math teacher and he told me that preparation is always key. "If you don't prepare for what's coming, then you'll end up with bad results and vice versa." The purpose of preparation is to reduce anxiety from uncertainty. Even me as a person, I'm not a big fan of being spontaneous. I've always been a planner so that I don't have panic attacks. This quote doesn't apply to just academics, but even swimming as well. If I don't practice how I'm going to swim in a race during practice, then of course I will not swim fast at a meet. From experience, I know some of my past teammates rely on their talent more than hard work. I honestly don't think I have any swimming talent, so it's mostly just working as hard as I can. However, there are times where my dad's quote of preparation doesn't come into play. For

four years, I've been aiming to break 57 seconds in a 100 backstroke. The training is there, but at meets it seems like all of the hard work isn't coming into play in my race. I would drop tenths of a second, but I still end up not reaching my goal. Having this continue for 4 years makes me even question if I'm ever going to break 57 seconds in a 100 backstroke. Even my coaches hype me up for my 100 backstroke and claim that I'll go 55-56 seconds, but after swimming the event for so many years and not making any significant changes makes me think otherwise. With so many trial runs, it seems like there isn't much uncertainty for that race. Having that thought is unhealthy, which is why I don't think about times as much as before. At this point, all I want to do is contribute to the team and enjoy my time competing the water as I can because it's going to end in a few years. I guess the only uncertainty that I have at the moment is whether I can even go faster than last year with the schedule that I have this semester. I can even feel that the strokes feel different, strength is decreasing, but endurance is increasing so that's a plus, I guess.

Besides performance in the pool and in academics, there's even uncertainty with relationships with people as well. For me, sometimes I struggle opening up myself to my team because they might not like me for who I am. From experience with my family getting into trouble with other swim families and coaching staff on my previous club teams, it's hard to trust people who I really want to trust. With uncertainty when it comes to relationships, it tends to eat me up mentally because I over think everything. I can think about it the whole practice time and not even focus on what I'm doing.

The way that I cope with my anxiety from uncertainty is just to stay calm as addressed before, taking deep breaths, listening to my chill beats playlist, even giving myself self talks that I'm going to be okay. Most of the time I like to be alone to calm down or have one-on-one talks with a close person about the most random things helps calm me down.

Swimmer 16

I think that the tension of uncertainty is part of what makes racing very fun. For me, not knowing what to expect takes away pressure that I may feel when I compete. There are so many variables that go into racing, so many things can go right or wrong, and that is super exciting. I think the "unknown" parts of sport is what attracts so many people to it. I think that if you took away the tension of uncertainty that comes with sport, a lot less people would

choose to take part. If all parts of sport were known, I think that it would quickly become mundane and repetitive.

I think that there is a balance between knowns and unknowns in sport. That balance is really important to me because I enjoy the consistency and schedule that swimming brings to my life, but I also rely on those times of uncertainty for motivation and excitement.

Swimmer 17

I feel as if swimming is one of the most unknown sports there is. A lot of the time, this becomes an issue. An issue of nerves, stress, panic, and even puke. But I also think that the uncertainty can be such a good thing. I am a person who loves knowing things and what is going to happen, but when I let go of that side of me, I am able to have a little more positivity. When thinking of the unknown as something good, it allows me to relax, find joy in racing, and let whatever happens, happen. I think that uncertainty can be sweet because although the unknown can be scary, giving it a chance will lead to happiness in the end. Letting go is hard, no doubt about that but finding the good rather than the bad allows for sweetness.

Swimmer 18

Every time I get ready for a meet, I try to do that thing where you visualize your race. I feel like I'm not particularly good at this, but I always find myself thinking what if the "ideal" race that I visualized were to actually happen. Like if all the stars were to align and I felt really good and I swam really well. When I think this, I feel like I never take myself seriously but honestly there is no reason I shouldn't. I am perfectly capable of making the "stars align" and swimming well without any outside force. And I think that with all the uncertainty that comes with competition, that's the sweetness. Because instead of thinking of all the bad things that could happen or go wrong, there will always be that "what if" to get excited about. Sometimes it's hard to recognize that all of this is worth it when there is so much to be afraid of, but the uncertainty of the "what if" continues to get me up every day and excited enough to try.

Swimmer 19

For me, the uncertainty that comes with swimming is both exciting and scary at times. I get really nervous behind the blocks before most of my races just thinking about the different ways my race could go. Although it can be scary, it is also exciting not knowing because at

that point being behind the blocks everything else is out of your control. I just have to realize that I have done everything in my control to prepare myself for my race and there is nothing else I should be stressing about. And then looking at the bigger picture on swimming as a whole I think right now there is so much uncertainty with how crazy this season has been with covid that it has made me work harder just because I know it will be so much better and exciting when we do get to go back to a normal competition season.

Swimmer 20

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Swimmer 21

I think that without uncertainty sport would become boring. If you always knew who was going to win the meet or football game would fans even come to watch? If I knew the exact outcome of my race there would be no adrenaline right before it. I'm currently in a philosophy class which recently talked about Socrates which quoted "the unexamined life is not worth living." With knowing the outcome of sport, we could never even attempt to learn anything from it thus giving it little meaning. Something my high school coach always used to say was that you didn't have to feel good to go fast, which was always a really hard concept for me to execute. But I think with this concept the uncertainty makes that phrase much more exciting and not as painful of a thought. On Monday afternoons we have been doing some variation of the descending 100's, and the set itself I love, but sometimes knowing what is coming if I'm having an off day makes it more challenging to get in the mindset to do it well. For me that happened this Monday were I was a bit tired from doing many things with my parents and dreading a bit that they were leaving the next day. I dove in the water and immediately didn't feel great. I figured that this is just a set that I'll have to get

through, it doesn't have to be as good as weeks prior. As the set started and got down to the 1:15 portion I was fighting so hard not physically but I wanted to change my mindset so badly. Somehow, I was able to turn it around for myself and probably did my personal best on that set than the other variations of past Mondays. And it meant more to me because I didn't feel great either. I took that uncertainty and was able to decide that I wanted that set to go well. I wasn't expecting to have a great set but afterwards I felt great because I didn't know that that would be the outcome. And I learned that it is actually possible for me to do well even if I don't feel so "in flow" which I hope to continue to remember because I know sometimes those days won't be perfect but to get better and be excited about the hard days I just have to remember that you never know what may happen and what may get turned around.

Swimmer 22

For me and probably everybody else, I show up to practice have no idea what is going to happen. Sometimes it can be scary or feel good like what you said. In terms of practices, I don't know what to expect with the practices or what the sets will be like because if I don't know, I will try hard during the set. Some people go to mornings and spoil the main set which sometimes determines how good I will do during that practice. But in terms of life, not knowing what is going to happen the next day is what I like. I like not knowing what could happen next. If I know what could happen, it could lead to anxiety or anticipating that very moment. I want to live my life not knowing what's going to happen next because it leaves me with the question "what will happen tomorrow? in the next year? next 10 years?...etc.

Swimmer 23

I feel like I either need to know exactly what needs to happen or need to have no clue. I think my best races have been when I completely forget about the outcome, and I just focus on the moment instead of trying to focus on the time/ending places. In non-athletic setting I think I need to know what is going to happen more often than not. The not knowing what is going to come next makes me very anxious, like going to new places, doing new things, or meeting new people is super anxiety inducing.

I think during practices I like to know a general idea of what we are doing so it is easy to mentally prepare, but at the same time it can set a tone for the practice, whether that be good or bad. And during meets I like to know exactly the event order, what times events are

supposed to start how many heats there are, etc. But when it comes to actually races, I do not want to know anything.

Swimmer 24

Personally, I do not handle uncertainty well. Ever since I was a little girl I have always been the type A kind of person when it comes to my life and things that I do, so when something comes my way that I do not know what the outcome will be I become very unsettled and physically sick because I have always had this need to do well from myself and my parents. This does not mean I do not like challenges though, I love challenges and pushing myself to the edge to see how far I go, and if an unexpected thing happens in my life, I do not run away saying that wasn't a part of my plan, I tackle headfirst. Now that I am thinking about this more, I am realizing that I am more comfortable with uncertainty in my regular life as in a school or relationships with others, however, when it comes to swimming I do not handle it as well. I have never really learned how to cope with the anxiety that engulfs me when I swim because everyone in my life before now expected no emotion and when I tried to explain my anxiety, they just brushed it off as I am exaggerating or blowing things over proportion. The only thing that really helped me calm my nerves would be to have someone distract me as long as they could to try to get me out of my head but that couldn't always happen, especially when I got older because I was grown and thought to handle my own problems. So, to me uncertainty is not too sweet in my opinion because I associate it with what I feel for swimming. The only positive I can think of out of it is the extreme adrenaline rush when I am behind the blocks staring out into the pool until my vision goes black like I am somewhere else, my body tingles to the point of numbness, and my heart rate races as I get on the blocks anticipating the buzzer to begin the inevitable. The weird thing is, usually when I have trust in my coach, and the pool, that feeling of anxiety slightly dims and the uncertain becomes doable in a sense of I trust everything works out how it is supposed to and what needs to happen will happen. However, I have not fully learned how to get that feeling on my own or even if the anxiety is bad to healthily cope. If I am being completely honest, I haven't even thought about it until now.

Swimmer 25

One thing that carries concern to me that might be unknown to the team would be that I have never actually trained with a group of girls before. All my life, each swim group that I have

been placed with has been with mostly boys. When I was 10, I did have some close girlfriends in my group, but by the time we turned 13, I had been moved to the high-performance group while the rest of them were left in the lower group, or they had all quit. In my current group, there are only 2 girls, including me. Even during my Canada Games training camp, they put me in the boy's training group cause no other girl had the endurance to keep up with me. I mean, that can be taken as a good thing and a bad thing, but I seriously have no idea how to train with girls. My biggest fear would have to do with jealousy. I know girls tend to get jealous, and if I come in for my first practice in January and end up faster than the other girls in the group, how does that make me look. I do not want people to be jealous of my speed in swimming. I have just put in a lot of hard work and dedication to my sport. I also do not want to come in and slow it down so that the other girls won't be jealous. I am not sure if this quite makes sense, but it has been something on my mind for a while. I hope I can come into the group, and we can hopefully get along in harmony, and the others respect me for all the work I have put in to be where I am today. Why don't coaches tell the swimmers what they will be doing the next practice? They never prepare us for the death of a practice that follows. There is always this element of surprise when you walk into the pool; will it be a fly set, are we doing fast kick today, maybe we are getting some starts off the blocks. It is both scary but also exciting at the same time. I wish that I was told prior, but then I figure that if my coach told me that we will be doing a sprint free practice, I would not show up. I don't like doing sprint practices. It always makes me feel bad about myself. The other day, for instance, I went a 1:02 100free SCM and that's pretty solid for me. Yet the girls in the younger group are hitting a minute flat and I am blown away with how slow I am. However, I did a 1km for time, SCM on Saturday and absolutely crushed it, going a 12:25, basically holding 1:14. That does not really have to do with the topic of uncertainty, but I just feel really good about my 1km. I am also writing this before practice, and I am hoping it is an easier one because the IM set we did this morning was absolutely brutal. When it comes to deal with uncertainty, I think one needs to understand what is in their control, and what is not. I can't control what the practice will be, but I can control my attitude and how much effort I am willing to put into a set or a race. I try to think of the positives; even though it is a sprint set, maybe I can work on faster turns which I can use in my distance swims. There can be a lot of anxiety linked with uncertainty, but as my dad says "sometimes you need to keep

yourself on your toes” or “a little rise in blood pressure never hurt anyone”. There is also uncertainty with moving away from home; am I going to make friends, will people like me, how am I gonna adjust to college life, will I get homesick. I am excited about that new adventure though. I have been dreaming of this moment for so long, and even though it brings some uncertainty, it is very exciting at the same time.

Week 8: Relationship to Coach

Reflection Prompt:

This week we began with your coach discussing his growth as a coach over the past five years and how his understanding of athletes has changed upon years of study and reflection. On Wednesday we read from Kareem Abdul-Jabbar’s memoir of his fifty-year relationship with his coach. On Friday, each of you had an opportunity to “coach” one of your peers for a short time.

For the past two months we have discussed how learning can be a kind of dance between the Knower, the Knowing, and the Known (Gill, 1993). Your coaches throughout your life have been an important partner in this dance. One day you may become a head of a family, an organization, a classroom, or perhaps even a team of your own. Think about how you would like to be perceived as a leader and coach. Describe the environment you would want to create, how you would lead, and some of the important values you would instill in your “team.”

Swimmer 1

Coaches have made a big impact in my life whether it was good or bad. Some of my coaches only cared about the numbers we put up for our races and others cared about who we are and our journey in the water and in life. Obviously, the coaches who cared about who I was and my journey through life impacted me the most. One of my favorite coaches, was so passionate about her job and making sure everybody felt a part of the team and valued curiosity while we trained and raced. She was always open to talk to you if you had rough day and lead us with compassion rather than putting herself above us. Someday, when I am a leader of whatever it is, I want to empower people and help them improve themselves and others through encouragement and a positive environment. I also want to enforce curiosity and learning in whatever I am learning because you are always learning and without curiosity there cannot be breakthroughs. I also value empowering others because just by

giving someone a compliment or saying something nice to them it can make a huge difference on how they see themselves and then how they treat others. I also want to have a relationship to whomever I'm leading to be fairly equal because we can all learn from each other no matter how old or experienced we are.

Swimmer 2

I remember every coach that I have had through my swim career and each of them has embedded core values that I live by to this day. Coaches that I had when I was younger have made me the person I am today. The sport itself has given me the determination and work ethic that I have today but my coaches have turned me into the woman I am and have helped mold me into someone that I am glad I became. When I swam at *Swim Club* my coach for most of my swim career was *Coach's Name* who I look up to tremendously. She of course she helped me initially learn all the strokes and pushed me to my limit, but she also showed me what person I want to become which is someone that pushes yourself to the next level and shows a great deal of confidence in your ability. I am still working on the last part, but it is something that I want to be able to do fully. She passed away a couple of years ago and that tore me to pieces and every time I jumped into the pool, I thought of her and to this day I still do. My teammates and I got a tattoo in memory of her, we got a phrase that she said to us every day which was "Feel Your Power". With this tattoo, I know that she is always by my side and always will be.

As I got older and was looking to swim in at the college level, I had coaches that were more intense but also are a huge part of my life. When I moved to *New Swim Club*, *Coach's name* started coaching me and he is someone that I will be in contact with for the rest of my life probably. He never gave up on me even when I gave up on myself and I think that is the true definition of a good and dedicated coach. In the middle of my sophomore year, I was going to quit the sport and just stay in-state to go to school. He told me to wait the season out and I would see some of the results I would be wanting. I decided to keep training and of course, he was right. In my junior and senior year, I had the best 2 seasons of my life and if I didn't have him to keep pushing me, I wouldn't be swimming here and would definitely not be in Idaho. And coming here you have been a coach that has helped mold me to the woman I am today, you have never given up on me either and keep pushing me to be the best I can be. You have helped me tremendously through these two seasons and have made me look at

myself in a different way. I realized that what I was doing to myself mentally was not good and was hindering me from my full potential. It is a work in progress, but I know I have you by my side to help me when I am stuck in this process.

If I ever have the chance to coach someone, I want to be like you and Bob, someone who never gives up on someone no matter how defeated they look. I also want to be someone for people to look up to and want to be a role model figure. With some of the freshmen, I somewhat feel like I have that role, especially within the distance group. *Teammate* was my role model last year and I looked up to her and still do and this year I feel like I have taken on that role and hope I am doing it justice. My main goal with anything is to help people as much as I can and give the best advice I can.

Swimmer 3

I have always been a pleaser. I like to please my parents, my coaches, and my peers. This can be a bittersweet thing because sometimes what isn't best for me but someone else wants me to do it gets me in trouble. I have been very lucky to have some amazing coaches that have taken into account things that will get me far in life as well as swimming. This last year my coach that got me to where I am in swimming was fired from our swim club, while this was a huge and unfortunate event, it was devastating to me. This coach looked past just yards and only swimming and really knew me as a person. He would let me take a day off a week so that I could spend time with my horses. While this may look like a red flag it had the exact opposite effect on swimming. Because I had that day off each week I wasn't burnt out and tired on Thursday, just swimming to get through the sets. That day off gave me a boost to finish out the week and a hunger to get back in the pool on that Thursday morning while some of my teammates just drug their feet to morning practice. This balanced allowed me to not compensate for lack of effort when I was tired, it gave me something to look forward to. This coach was different than my other coaches. I had good relationships with other coaches, but this coach held me to expectations but knew me well enough to know when enough was enough. He knew what to say after races and how to push me in practice every day. He almost filled in as a second dad for me the last five years because of lots of family problems. He made me the swimmer I am because it's hard for me to get out of my comfort zone when I don't feel good. We worked on this for years because practice has always been where I preform with the better headset.

When *coach* had to leave deck in October of last year it was definitely the most mentally straining season of my life, I was ready to say that it at the end of march. But I took a day and called *coach*, we talked for hours in between sr state and sr sectionals. He was able to turn my headset around in one conversation and make me rethink how I was going to prepare for the next race and the following weekend, no matter how bad I felt. This is what made his stand apart from my other coaches, he held me to high standards and called me on my bs sometimes, but he also knew exactly how to set me up for success, mentally and physically. A good coach can be personable but has to gain the respect of the swimmer and the coach must also gain the respect of the coach. Respect, trust, and hard work. The dance between athlete and coach.

Swimmer 4

No response

Swimmer 5

Being a coach seems like such a tough job both mentally and physically. If I were a coach, I think I would create such a safe, inviting, hardworking, and fun space. To better describe these characteristics, I think that I would be hype and create sets that will allow my swimmers to be successful only if they want to. I think it's important for the swimmers to do the swimming and for me as a coach to support their hard work and push them to be their best. I think it would be so fun for me and for them if I can bring some energy and hype for those long and fast sets. I also would try to be as understanding as possible, one of my old coaches used to believe in doing your best each minute at a time. I would try to encourage this into my swimmers and make an environment where everyone strives for success, and I could be there as emotional support and a crutch. I would also try to help each one with their technique and reinforce the little things that they should be thinking about during the sets. I think that having a fun space where my swimmers can respect me, and I can also be passionate and yell at them if needed ahahaha. I think that I should try to have a good relationship with all my students. Overall, I think that in order to create a hype and exciting environment I have to be passionate, understanding, and hardworking myself so that we can all work together to make success happen.

Swimmer 6

Someday in the future, when I lead other people, I would want them to think of me as a good leader. I want to be perceived as someone who isn't afraid to lead and can be trusted. Trust is a very important quality in a leader. I want to be a reliable leader that other people can look up to and depend on.

The environment I want to create is a good and safe one that others can feel comfortable and inclusive in. I don't want people to be afraid to be themselves. A happy and workable community where others get along is a place I want to create. A thriving community is one that gets the most work done.

I would teach my team to be leaders. They would see my qualities of being a leader and follow after me. I would teach them that trust is important and being kind to others is just as important. I would teach them to include others and not make people feel left out. I would show them what doing the right thing feels and looks like.

Swimmer 7

My freshman year of high school, I was moved into the top group on my club team. I remember being nervous, as I was one of the youngest ones there and had never trained so intensely before. But come to find out, the slight age gap and the intense training regimen were not the biggest challenge I faced: it was my coach. Prior to this particular coach, I had had very positive experiences with my club coaches. They did their jobs, helping me develop not only into a better swimmer but a better person as I grew up, which I what I believe a good coach should do. I expected nothing less from this coach. In fact, I think I expected more, considering he was the coach of the most elite athletes in our program and the head coach of the entire team. At first, he seemed welcoming and kind. But the more time I spent in this new group, the more I realized that this coach was different. I did well at first, dropping time almost every time I raced and earning his praise. But soon, my times began to level off, and I was treated much differently. When I would ask for technique advice, and he would give me half-hearted answers. When my back pain got worse, he accused me of faking it. When I told him of my dreams of swimming in college, he told me I wasn't fast enough. The emotional and physical pain he made me endure was heartbreaking, and I don't think I realized just how bad it was until he was gone. He made me begin to question not only if I was wasting my time coming to practice each day, but he made me

question who I was. Thankfully, after just over a year, he was fired (for multiple reasons). My parents told me then that if he hadn't been fired, they were considering pulling me from the team because they couldn't bear to watch my coach treat me like that anymore. I told them the thought of quitting had been bouncing around in my head because of him but we agreed to wait it out and see if his replacement would be better. We went through a period of a few months with fill-in coaches. That period might have been the toughest for me. I felt like I had been abandoned, even though I was glad my previous coach was gone and wanted guidance through that difficult part of my life but was left with nobody. Finally, our team hired a new coach. At first, I was wary of him. I had been so badly burned by my last coach that it took me a while to trust him. But this man was much different. He genuinely cared. He asked how my day was, paid full attention when I asked him questions, worked with me to find out how to deal with my back issues, and, most importantly, he made me fall in love with the sport all over again. Without him, I would have likely quit the sport and gave up on my dream of swimming collegiately. But here I am, proving my horrible coach wrong and able to connect again with a coach that genuinely cares again (that's you, Coach Mark). Swimming under my most recent club coach and my current college coach have reminded me that great coaches aren't the ones who make you the fastest or push you the hardest; they are the ones who listen when you speak, who go out of their way to ensure that you are okay, who inspire their athletes each day. That is what makes a great leader, and that is what I aspire to be one day. These men have assured me that it is possible and that I am on the right track.

Swimmer 8

On my old team this last summer we talked a lot about what kind of role we played on the team and what we ultimately wanted to play on the team. On my old team, I like to think of myself as a leader, but there are different types of leaders, led by example, vocal leader, etc. I definitely lead by example, showing up to practice every day with a positive attitude, cheer on teammates, doing every rep, etc. This doesn't mean that I was silent often offering guidance but in a one-on-one setting instead of in front of the entire group and organizing most of the team bonding events behind the scenes. I strive to be this kind of leader again on this team eventually because I think it was crucial in developing strong and personal relationships with all of my teammates, but I also realize that I need to be more vocal within

sets or lifting (among other things). My senior year on the high school team I had the opportunity to be a team captain, I think this allowed me to be a more vocal leader, but it also allowed my behind the scenes qualities to also shine through, organizing the gear and spirit days.

Swimmer 9

Sometimes when someone says coach or coaching, their first thought is athletics because yes there is a lot of coaching and coaches in athletics. We forget that there is more than just a sport coach, or family, friends, teachers, bosses, other adults, they all influence our life, and they all teach us something. Now teaching or coaching doesn't always have to be good, sometimes a person is teaching you about yourself so you can learn your boundaries and what to tolerate and what not to tolerate. For this journal I'm going to kind of break it up my influential coaches I've had throughout my 18 years.

First up, we have my parents, mostly my mom because I had more time with her, and she really helped me through my teenage years and that was when I was struggling the most. But my mom has taught me everything basically, she was there to guide me while taking my first steps, she was there when I started eating solid food, she was there to take me to my first swim lesson, she taught me manners, and what I think is most important is she taught me how to love life and to live my life to the fullest. She taught me that life is about the small and big moments, that there is more to life than material products, there is more beyond the borders of my small bubbled hometown. Life is about the experiences, she really pushed my passion for traveling, I love it I love being immersed into a new culture and see that there really is life beyond lake Oswego, and that there are good people out there. I could go on and on about my mom, but bottom line she's taught me a lot about life and happiness, and I thank her for that.

Next up is my swimming coaches. Before being a vandal, I really only had two main coaches, *coach* and *coach*. My team had other coaches as well and they were all amazing and so incredibly kind, but *coach* was my main coach on the *swim team*, and before the *swim team* I was on *other team* with *coach*, he actually joined *swim team* for a short period of time, but he was not the best influence. I thought I looked up to *coach*, because he taught my 8-year-old self how to swim, how to sprint, how to race. But he started to pick favorites, and he made it clear who the favorites were, and that's something I don't agree with, I don't think

you should like someone more because they are faster. You should treat everyone equally no matter their speed, speed is nice and it is good for racing and points, but also character and personality is a huge thing, and I have known many swimmers and coaches who only liked you if you had certain times, and if you didn't you would get ignored and you were irrelevant and they were rude or harsh to you. If I were to ever coach, yes, I would [want] fast swimmers, but I would want to also have good genuine people, I would want a team full of supportive teammates and coaches you know? Like just good people. So, at a young age I dealt with *coach* and most the time he'd show up to practice hungover and sometimes high or something, he was young and immature but I'm sure he has grown as a person now. Now *coach* has been my primary coach for over 10 years. He was a funny, caring and passionate guy, he cared for his swimmers, and he always knew how to have fun, whether its singing or dancing in the middle of practice or playing loud music or playing basketball until he won (usually took a very long time). And for me, he really stepped in as a father figure when I was struggling with everything. He helped my mom by letting me swim with the older kids so that we didn't have to be at the pool for 7 hours waiting for my sister to swim and then me. He offered emotional support, and he had my back, he supported me and was also hard on me, he wanted to see me succeed and he pushed me in practice and pushed me to do well in school. He wasn't a perfect person, but who is? I definitely had my moments with him where I was upset and mad but that's just part of life and coaching it's not easy, there are many ups and many downs. So, from my coaches I have learned a lot about myself and what I need as a swimmer. I need to be coached as *swimmer's name*, because I am different than other swimmers, and vice versa, everyone is their own swimmer, and everyone needs to be coached to help themselves. I need a coach who is supportive and can help me through my rough patches. I need a coach who is going to help me grow as a swimmer and just as a person, swimming is more than just the pool, a swimmer, and a coach, it's also about the relationships and connections you make along the way.

And finally, my friends or a few that I am going to talk about. Most the time coaching or teaching is done by someone older with more experience, and I have a lot of older adults that have help me through life, but I can't forget about my friends or ex-friends. My best friend is named *friend's name*, and he have now been inseparable for 7 years or so, but he has taught me so much about myself. He has taught me a lot on how I should be treated and how I

shouldn't be, he's been there for the breakdowns, the pain and the heartache. Each time he helps me back on my feet and kinda reviews what happened so we can both learn from my experience or his. But what I have really learned from him is how to love and believe in myself. And I'll be honest, my mental health is rocky at times, but who's isn't? Everyone struggles with their own personal demons; I've always struggled with self-confidence and self-esteem. My biggest enemy is myself, because when I start to negative talk it gets bad, I never feel smart enough, or good enough, fast enough or pretty enough. Sometimes I let other people opinions of me change me I try to change myself to fit other people's needs and be what they think is a better version of myself. But *friend's name* has taught me that I am good enough and that I should want to be better for myself and not someone else. Even when I am at my lowest, he always is there and has my back and believes in me even when I don't believe in myself. And, because of him I have learned what it means to be a good friend and I hope to one day be considered as a good friend. Some of my other friends or ex-friends, they taught me how to respect myself and others. Some of the things they did to me, I had to learn the hard way, but I learned my boundaries and I learned what to tolerate and what to stand up for. And I think in those moments they also learned that their actions can really hurt others and they should think before acting. So even though it was painful for me I am glad I was able to show them how they should treat people, because some of them will never do what they did to me again, because they saw how hurtful they can be.

So, after all of this writing, which I have no idea if any of it makes sense, but this has helped me get to know myself better. Life is unexpected and there are many ups and downs. But I hope that one day I can be that loving, supportive, caring, passionate, funny, nice, strong woman for my mum, my siblings, my friends, my coaches, my husband, my children, my coworkers or anyone that needs me. I want to have my mom's joy and adventurous sense, my coach's compassion and support, and *friend name's* love and belief.

We talked about my anxiety this week and how it works me up and I feel like I'm losing control. But after writing this it was kind of like a refresher to live my life and that there is a plan for me. I need to start believing in myself and my abilities, because I believe that I can be a better swimmer, an amazing doctor, a strong woman and a good person. So, I think I'm on to something, it all starts with baby steps.

Swimmer 10

I think through most of my swimming career I have not had the best experience with coaching. I don't think most of my coaches cared about me because I wasn't ever the fastest one the team. I think I was only ever noticed for my happiness and positive attitude, at least those were the only awards I seemed to get. Growing up I was the kid in our family that did all the sports but wasn't as good at school. That didn't mean I would get bad grades, but it meant I had to work really hard to get A's and I never made the gifted and talented club like my brother and sister. When I decided to start swimming, my brother and sister had already been swimming for a few years so I was nervous to start so much later than them, thinking I would be so far behind. However, I actually got the hang of it and enjoyed it right off the bat. But just like school, I had to work hard to just be able to make it to certain meets, where my brother and sister could do it so easily. They made zones every year and I didn't, which was really exciting, but at the same time, very frustrating. Until I joined this team, I've had to encourage myself to stay in the sport, I've had to deal with sometimes being left behind or forgotten about, and work as hard as I possibly can to get where I want to go and sometimes that doesn't even work out. I was my own coach, but now I have a coach that I trust, that cares about me, and wants me to get better in all aspects of my life. Thank you, thank you for everything you have done for me.

Swimmer 11

Throughout my swimming career I have had many coaches. Many people look up to their coaches as leaders and people we strive to become. They are people who shape us into people we want to become or show us how to lead. However, I have to admit that my coaches have shaped me into people I do not wish to become. I believe that there is a point in my swim career where I actually became a swimmer would be under my first bad coach. This guy was a special one and I will never forget his mustache. The way in which he presented each set brought me fear, and I no longer enjoyed going to practice. He was just too intense for children in 6th grade. Moving forward to the following year, I had a coach that presented himself as a happy, loving person. I truly enjoyed swimming under him as he brought a positive feeling to the pool deck. But at what point does this become creepy and that is what I have learned. A coach's relationship with an athlete is a delicate balance between friend, leader and stranger. Coaches need to be able to keep their distance and the position of power

cannot be used to take advantage of children. This is what my coach did. Although, his actions were not the most inappropriate towards me, there were certain conversations and actions that made me feel uncomfortable looking back at it. I may have been able to leave prior to things completely being at the worst point, but when a coach is accused of sexual assault on two accounts against people you grew up with, you really learn to not trust those in a position of power. Although sexual passes were never made at me, something like this does not sit nicely with you and has a long-lasting effect on you. I have definitely have put up guards against coaches because of this, helps me realize how I never want to be in a position of power. I would never want to abuse that important role I have been given and would want to use that opportunity to guide people to be the best people they can be. This coach hindered so many people and so did my other coaches to come. The next two coaches were so egotistical they forgot that they were human, just coaching humans. They placed more emphasis on winning then on being good people. They did not care who's feeling they hurt or how they guide people. In *Professor's* class we talked about if sports should be played in school and if they truly build character in which they are supposed to do. I think that this is an interesting question because it can help but equally hinder. These coaches hindered either own, and many swimmers' character. I would not be these people. I would not want anyone to feel the way they made me feel and would not want to feel so invested in something I felt I had to belittle and deteriorate people's emotional states only to win. And finally, I had my coach who believed it was okay to call someone cancerous. This coach did care and tried to be a good person. However, he was working under the egotistical psycho (sorry just my true feelings) made it difficult to do the right thing. This situation, although made me feel horrible and hate swimming, but made me realize that if I am in a position power, I do not ever want to handle a situation in that manner. You must be able to stay calm because your words hurt more being in that power. In conclusion, coaches have an impact they need to understand, and they need to cherish that relationship and ensure it does not cross the line.

Swimmer 12

No response

Swimmer 13

The type of leader I'd like to be perceived as is a leader or coach that knows the people, they are leader, meaning a person who doesn't just know the names of the people they lead, rather

know the people's life and who they really are has individuals. When you know the people, you deal with, to me, it better helps you lead because you have that understanding of where everyone is coming from and why they are the way they are so you can better coach and lead them in the right direction. The environment would be one where everyone is free to feel comfortable and safe and can always come up and say what's bothering them without rephensions or getting judged. Some important values I would have are to always respect your peers around you but if something is notably wrong consistently, either have an adult conversation with the person and discuss the issue or bring it up to a coach or a leader.

Swimmer 14

For my entire life I've looked up to my family and coaches who have helped me become the person I am today. I one day have hopes and dreams to become a leader, whether that be in my own family, organization or even coach. The impression I would want to leave behind is to believe in yourself, know your values and where you come from. To love everyone equally, assume the good in everyone until proven otherwise, and most importantly work hard but have fun!

Swimmer 15

No response

Swimmer 16

I have always seen coaching and coaches as a very important part of sport. The coaches that I have had throughout my life have been very influential, in and out of the water. I think that coaches need to be someone that I can talk to and be close with as sport is such a personal thing. My coach in Utah was a great example of this and helped me figure out a lot of things about swimming and life as I was growing up, he was one of my coaches since I was ten. I have always looked up to coaches as I know that being so involved in a sport can be difficult as they also deal with the frustration, disappointments, and hardships that their athletes may experience, but coaches also get to be involved in the victories, happiness, and fulfillment that their athletes may also experience.

I have had a few opportunities to be a leader on a team and I am grateful for those. I enjoy being a leader and I want those around me to know that by the way that I approach leading. Being a leader isn't "extra work" or a "burden", but an opportunity to make an impact on the people that I lead and the future of the team that I am a part of.

Swimmer 17

My coaches have always been a big part of my life. Whether it be my ELP teacher in elementary school, my parents, or my swim coach that has been with me for many years now, they have shaped me to become a leader myself one day. I want to create an environment that includes respect, growth, and happiness. All three of those values are important to me and are important for the future people I lead to understand. I want to do this by not only being a coach but being a friend that people can count on and talk to forever. I love my coaches and they will forever be a part of my life. That is the feeling I want to give to the future. Coaches affect us in more ways than we understand, and I will be thankful for every one of them that comes into my life.

Swimmer 18

I grew up on a really small team. I am what you would call a "homegrown" athlete. Because of this, I was able to see my team both at its worst and its best. I know what bad leaders look like, and when I was younger, we lacked athlete leadership on my team. As I grew up, I was placed in a position of leadership. I was the oldest on my team for about 3 years, I always wanted to be someone that the little kids could talk to and rely on; I tried my best to be the type of leader I never had growing up. I was that kid who got fast early on, I would beat the older girls and they hated me for it. When they all graduated, I was left as the oldest on a team of fast middle schoolers. I would get my ass kicked by 13yr olds on the daily, and sometimes that was really frustrating, but I knew that they needed me to be there for them. And so, I worked to be a better leader, one that empowers everyone around them, one that knows everyone's name and gets to know them on a personal level. I knew the kids who were five and the ones who were 15, this allowed me to help everyone feel like a valued part of my team and become more confident in their sport.

I have been a leader and a kinda a coach, the best teams are the ones who empower each other to be their best. My team's values are mental toughness, kindness, trust, and enthusiasm. These are what I would want to establish as a coach, and these are what I helped come up with as an athlete. These are the things that make me a better teammate. I trust my coaching and that my teammates will be there when I need them. Mental toughness is a big one on my team; we do hard things and we do them together. Enthusiasm reminds people to get excited about what they and their teammates are doing. And finally, kindness is always

important no matter what, everyone brings something to the team, and they should be valued as such.

I really like how the reading this week talked about how his coach was someone who made him who he was. My coach taught me how to lead and how to get up when I fall and how to pick others up when they need help. He and my home team will forever be known as "my coach" and "my team" because they made me the person I am today.

Swimmer 19

Throughout my swimming career I have experienced good relationships with coaches as well as some bad relationships. There was a point where my coach was constantly discouraging me to the point where I wanted to quit swimming. However, experiencing having a coach that doesn't have their swimmer's best interest as a priority has allowed me to realize what a good coach should be. A good coach should help push their athletes to do the best they can in and out of the pool. Becoming a Vandal and having you as a coach for only a little over a year has already made me realize the impact you have had on me in not only my swimming but just in life. I can't thank you enough for caring so much about me in things far beyond swimming. A lot has changed in my life this past year, but I know I have a team and coach who support me. I value these traits in a coach, and I believe it has helped me grow as a swimmer and person and has helped guide me with how to handle these tough situations. When I become a leader one day, I hope to have these values that are important to me.

Swimmer 20

My relationship with coaching is probably just as complicated as my relationship with the sport itself. I've had multiple coaches from summer league, *former club team*, *other club team*, high school, and now Idaho. Throughout my years I've come to realize how much my relationship with a coach affects my performance, effort, and mental health. In high school, my coach was intense and scary and expressed his feelings through screaming. he did not seem to care about the character of his swimmers, but only how fast they can go. When I decided that I did not want to swim any longer, he completely disregarded the conversation and made me continue to swim. Coming here I knew that I would do much better with the coaching strategies here. My freshman year was hard in all aspects, but after that my relationship with you greatly improved. Since then, I have had a better experience

swimming and here in Idaho all together. Aside from a swim coach, every good relationship with someone in a leadership position is so meaningful. Being a leader on this team this year has been so rewarding for me. Although the swimming part has been hard on me just knowing that going fast was so easy for me at the end of high school and now it has not been that way. But, after having a pretty hard talk with my mom this week she helped me realize that it does not matter how fast I go to make an impact on the team. Being a leader and engaging alumni and future vandals through the Instagram makes more of an impact as a team than going a fast time. I really believe that having a good relationship with leadership and coaching is something that can change every part of your life.

Swimmer 21

Every coach I've ever had has been so different and ranging in strengths and weaknesses. My first "guides" were my parents. My dad continued to coach me through my young years as he was the age group coach of the first club I swam at. My friends always loved him because he was fun and probably loved the games that we would play just as much as the swimmers did. Obviously, I had a different relationship with my dad as a coach than at home. No one has a perfect relationship with their parents, but my dad and I have pretty clashing personalities at times, so even when I was younger, I felt that how people viewed him at practice was a different person that I knew. So, from that I'd say that I would want to act with consistency as a coach. I know that I different level of professionalism would be required on deck, but I'd hope to be a consistently likeable and helpful person on and off the deck. My second coach in my preteen years was fine and honestly, I don't have much to say about him. From that I would say as a coach I want to be memorable. Part of the reason I want to become a coach in the first place is because of the impact that coaches have had on me, so I can only try to leave a positive mark on my future swimmers. My next coach from high school, whom you've talked to, definitely had the biggest impact on me. She taught us all how to be strong willed people and to stand up for the things we care about. I remember when we went to sectionals along with one other swimmer and she told me how she noticed the way people treated her since she was one of the only female coaches on deck, but she definitely is not a meek person. From her I want to be respected as a coach and not walked over in any sort of way as a female coach. I hope to be a caring teacher of more than just swimming while also being a strong leader. Next were the coaches from *Former College*. You've heard many things from

me about them already. At the end of the day, I didn't feel that our wellbeing was ever in their best interest, and I unfortunately don't have anything positive that I'd like to replicate from them. I am pretty comfortable with talking to adults and am not a big crier, but in the few times I went in to speak with the head coach, I would come out on the verge of tears regardless of the topic. I never felt like it was a safe space to express how I felt. From them I know I would want to create a safe and trustworthy space for my swimmers. I would hope that I can cultivate an environment that I could be looked up to by the athletes but not in a superiority sense, rather as the guide like you said. I always try to learn from my experiences whether they are good or bad and I'd like to offer that knowledge to others who can feel comfortable that I want the best for them. I think within a healthy and balanced environment the hard work and determination of the swimmers will come out on its own without force. I would want the pool to be a safe and lighthearted place where people can learn to be their best selves through the sport we love as well as enjoying and being proud of their hard work.

Swimmer 22

Growing up I was never really a leader and more of a follower. I was super shy and never was one to come out of my shell. I also would have rather followed people and not lead people. Since starting college, I have grown out of my shell and have grown to be a completely new person. I am more outgoing than I have ever been, and it feels great. It feels amazing to be able to speak out and have fun without being as shy. As the leader of the lane, I am faced with having to know the sets and when to leave. Some people who are also leading the lane might not know what the set is and would look to you to make sure that the set is right or to make sure they are doing it all correctly. I love being put in the position where when someone doesn't know what is happening, I can inform them and tell them what is going on. As a leader/coach I would want to create an environment that is teachable and if you make a mistake, you can learn from it. An environment where there are no wrong ways of doing something. In the little coaching exercise, we did yesterday in practice, it felt amazing to be able to fix something that was bothering *teammate*. We were working on her kick and turns and after every single one she told me what needed to be fixed or what felt weird. I would show her what mine looked like and did my best to explain it. She tried each and immediately after she told me that it feels amazing and that she noticed a huge difference in her kick speed or push off the wall from the turn. That was an amazing feeling for me to

be able to fix something that was off or to make someone happy about something really small but bug at the same time. Some important values I would instill in my team is that I want everyone to be a leader. That doesn't just mean be a leader of the lane but to show yourself as a leader and to not be a follower...

Swimmer 23

No response

Swimmer 24

I think as a coach I would want to be perceived as a friend but also looked up to in a sense. Like I don't want to come off as someone my people cannot go to because that is what I got as coaches, they turned me into a robot in a sense and I do not want that if I were to lead a group. However, I also want to be respected and listened to, I will not be a push over. I would want an environment where the people I would be leading felt comfortable also giving me advice and also building off of my advice to them. I don't have much to say on this kind of topic because I am not usually the one to lead. I tend to let others lead before I take a step into the role.

Swimmer 25

I have had my fair share of experiences with coaches throughout my swimming career. I've had some pretty crazy experiences with coaches that are just downright awful people that literally do not care about the swimmer's feelings. But I have also met coaches that are empathetic, and they listen to me as I feel safe to express my thoughts and emotions to them. If I were a coach, I think I would be too nice. I would never want anyone to go through the verbal, mental and physical abuse that I went through with my former coach, and therefore, I would want to be the complete opposite of that. I think that even though I am caring and kind, I would still be able to coach a great team. Being kind, caring, and open to your swimmers allows them to trust you as a coach. Being mean and scary only installs anxiety and stress to one, and you don't want to constantly be a ball of anxiety when you swim. I would want to create an environment where everyone gets along, and everyone cares about one another. Asking for everyone to get along all the time is definitely a whole lot to ask for, but I believe that if my team is open to one another, then we will be able to create a healthy and happy environment for my team to prosper in. I definitely love my teammates right now. I have been with my club team for almost 3years now, and I have seen many swimmers come

and go from the team. However, the team we have now have all been together for a year now, and I will be honest, they are the greatest group of kids. Everyone cares about each other. And maybe that's just because I am a great team leader, but I also genuinely believe that we all have a bond with each other. I try and ask everyone in my group at least once every day how they are, and how they are feeling. I know that they trust me as they are always open with me and seek my help when they need it. Now I know I do not coach the team but being a team leader and the captain is like being a friend or a mentor even. My coach now is great. He always tells me what is going on in his life, and he recently got a new phone so now he always shows us pictures of the owls in his barn, or he will show us his dogs, or the bear in his backyard. I believe that there are a few values that everyone should follow on my team: respect, dedication, inclusion, and sportsmanship. I believe that if everyone believed the same values that I do, I could make one hell of a team. I think that dedication is probably the most important value. Without dedication, there is no drive. There is no will to perform well or to push your teammates. You need to be committed and have the desire to achieve a goal or to achieve success in whatever form that is for you. You also need to remember that everyone is different, and we all come from different backgrounds. Inclusion is vital as even though we are all different people, we share similar goals, and we share the same love for swimming.

Week 9: Relationship with Team

Reflection Prompt:

After two months of reflection, we began this week by discussing our collective journey together. For many of us, one of the most important and enjoyable components of our sporting experience is our relationships with our teammates. On Wednesday we read several passages that challenged you to rethink your responsibilities to others and the importance of mutual respect. On Friday, you got into small groups to brainstorm words that describe the “values” of your team.

This week we would like you to describe the characteristics of a team and community. When does a team change into a community? Think about how a team helps individuals become stronger and how a team sustains, nurtures, and grows through experience.

Swimmer 1

I've been a part of some sort of team since I was 3 years old. At first it was a soccer team and then a few years later it was both a swim and a soccer team. Once I got old enough, I needed to choose which sport I wanted to do because both swimming and soccer became very demanding in my life. It basically came down to the team because I had such a great bond with my teammates from swim compared to soccer. This change made me realize how important a team was because my decision was solely on which team, I had the best connection with. For swim, we all encouraged each other while also playing pranks on one another and just having fun. The swimmers were also super high energy and crazy which I enjoy. Although through the years, there was some drama and our little group changed, at practice we still had fun and encouraged each other despite our differences. I am super excited to be on this team and create new relationships with the other swimmers and have fun!

Swimmer 2

A lot of people think of swim as an individual sport and to a certain extent, it is. We are swimming races on our own and we are pushing ourselves to our limit; we are not relying on another teammate for us to succeed. The team aspect may be seen during relays because 4 people are racing for all of them to place but you are in the pool by yourself, wanting to do well for the other 3 people in the relay. During our discussion on Friday afternoon, I began to understand how I see the sport and the team aspect within it. When I was at *former team* there was some sort of team aspect but because of how many people were on the team you had little groups that would support one another and overall, you are swimming on your own. Club swimming is a much more intense environment and people are fighting to succeed for themselves. I never really thought I was part of an actual team till I came here.

Swimming here has given me a new perspective of what an actual team is and what a true bond with your teammates is like. At *former team*, I had friends there that I still talk but I was never close to everyone on the team. Here I am close with every single person on the team, and I consider every person one of my friends. Everyone here has my back in and out of the pool environment; that is what I think the most important part of what being a teammate is like. I want my teammates to see me as a person that will cheer them on in every race but also help them with things outside the pool environment. Initially coming here, I

never thought I would make as close of friends that I have, I know that most people in my class will be in my life forever. They are people that will be at my wedding one day and I will be hanging out with them when I'm old.

Even though I am swimming races on my own I know that someone will be along the side of the pool cheering me on, even if it is for the duration of a mile. But during practice is when my teammates play the biggest role. Racing them pushes me to be better, talking with them during sets puts me in a better mood, and just being around them makes me love being in the water even more. Swimming distance sets by myself are hard in the aspect that I am all by myself and I can't race someone. I am able to push myself, but an element is missing when you aren't struggling and dying in a set with another person. Being next to *teammate, teammate, teammate, and teammate* make me love swimming because they make me laugh constantly; time goes by quicker. And honestly being next to anyone of my teammates would make swimming and training so much easier. That is also another aspect that makes a teammate so important to sport, especially swimming.

Swimmer 3

When the energy is high, and you know you've done your part to being greatest to the team is one of the most amazing feelings ever. The concept of team has always been a huge void I have wanted to fill for a long time. When I was closest with my team is when performed the best in my races as well. Two summers ago, and even stretching back to two winters ago is when team really came into the picture. We had lots of older girls graduate and it kind of brought peace on the team. There will always be cliques and groups within groups, but this was the first time our senior group really worked together. we were always assigned lanes for intervals and normal practice but on Thursdays we would break off into stroke groups, so you got to swim with different people as well as in a different lane. My best friend and I were the top of lane three, it was our lane. And with that came unspoken rules when you swam in this lane. The biggest to begin with was respect. Have respect for your teammates and leave 5 seconds behind. Have respect for yourself enough to say " hey I don't feel great today, wanna go ahead. I've noticed you have been rocking the set today." The next biggest thing was honesty. Being honest to your teammates and not just missing 50's just to sit out, or to be able to hop in front of someone. This honesty carried our lane through the season because by calling each other out on things we were doing great and also being able to give and take

criticism created an amazing athlete environment. we would have that shared suffering but with support and integrity. When you finished a set, you knew you made yourself and the people around you better for that day. That is what sticks out in my mind. Yes, we all worked super hard to get better, but we also held each other accountable because we know each other like family, the human brain will pick up on patterns and instead of acting on it in a bad way it was a way to reform your thinking into a growth instead of fixed mindset. Being in college I definitely see this resemblance. Instead of working against one another we are working together to achieve one goal. The hard work that is put in every day and the fun that comes out a practice where you get to race your teammate in the last 50 or build each other's confidence in a hard sprint set is what makes each week worth it.

Swimmer 4

When I think of the team and the sense of community, I tend to believe that the community comes before the team. When I swam in a club, especially in Boise, I always remember a deep-rooted bond between everyone. We all supported each other and shared a love for the sport we were engaged in. I think the team aspect is emphasized more once you reach the collegiate level.

Swimmer 5

I think that a team are people who work together to reach a common goal. While a community has the same characteristic but has more love and togetherness associated with it. I also think that community can be used as a broader term than team can be. For example, being a part of a club swim team is under the umbrella of USA swimming or SoCal swimming which is a whole community of swimmers pushing and competing with each other. I think that a team becomes a community when there is more love, acceptance, respect, and support. This means that once people start connecting more and moving past just teammates and to a deeper level than just swimming together. Having a community over a team makes individuals feel more accepted, inspired, and comfortable with themselves and others. Being able to create a community out of a team composed of all different types of individuals is what makes sport so amazing to me. Although everyone is different, we are all working towards getting better and we couldn't do it without anyone else's help. Also, when individuals in a team work together and watch each other grow, this vibe grows and inspires all of the people within the team to keep reaching for the stars and not wanting to give up.

This mood of success can be contagious and inspire sustainability within a team and how each individual pushes and supports each other to be better.

Swimmer 6

The characteristics of a team and community are working/communicating well with others, support-fullness, and overall building each other up. A team changes into a community when there is an environment that is like family. We learn to joke around with each other and know what is going on in someone's personal life. So, I think the correct term is when a team changes into a family like environment, rather than a community. Because even in communities, we don't know everyone's name or how everyone is doing.

Teams become stronger when everyone is inclusive. I feel like last year everyone was very inclusive but this year it's definitely different. This year there is definitely some exclusivity. Part of the reason is that it's hard to bond with others during these times, especially when some people don't follow the correct protocols. Also, this year's team has very different and strong personalities that can clash and I see that at practice.

Being inclusive is a big part of how a team functions and grows. Is there a way we can do that in practice and follow the correct protocols? That would be very beneficial and helpful in my opinion. Some of my ideas are doing fun relays where we can cheer each other on or do some fun racing games. I would LOVE to do something along those lines.

Swimmer 7

I have always loved swimming, but one thing I have struggled with in the past is the relationship I have had with my teammates. When I swam club, I had a difficult time connecting with the other individuals on my team. After 10 years of being on the *former team*, I think I have maybe three or four close friends who I am still in regular contact with from that team, which I guess is better than none, but I always wished it had been more. The group of swimmers a few years above us were always super tight knit. They would hang out on weekends, take each other to school dances, and motivate each other during practices. I always envied them. Soon, they left, and it was as though the divide among my age group widened even more, as we no longer had those good influences to look up to or strive to be like. It was really sad because even though we were a fast team, I think we really lacked where it mattered most: team bonding. We competed as individuals, focused on our own goals, instead of working with one another to achieve those goals or boost each other up

when we needed it most. Had we done that, perhaps we truly could have been great. Swimming is not just about speed; it's about the relationships you form while working together to do something amazing. And that is what I've found here at the University of Idaho: lifelong teammates, sisters, and friends. On my recruit trip, I knew from the moment I met the other girls that this school was the one for me. Sure, I loved the coaching staff, the campus, and the location itself, but what left the biggest impact on me were my fellow recruits and the current swimmers at the time. Everyone was so kind, welcoming, and supportive of one another, something I wasn't used to from swimming club. Thankfully, I ended up here with most of those girls, and that connection has only grown stronger over time. I finally feel like I have teammates I can truly lean on, count on, and who know my dreams and desires. That close-knit bond I yearned for so long is finally a reality and I am so thankful for every single one of the girls on my team now. They make me a better athlete and a better person every day, even if I am not best friends with them. There are five girls in particular who I have an unbreakable bond with, who I know will never fade from my life. Although one of them has transferred and no longer swims, as a group, we still talk almost every single day, sharing everything from our deepest secrets to our silliest jokes. Just because that one girl is gone doesn't mean we are any less connected; in fact, I feel even more connected to her than I did before. Even during quarantine, we would FaceTime weekly, and I counted down the days until I could see my best friends in-person again. They had grown to become such a big part of my life so not seeing them each day was extremely difficult. We went through a lot together during our freshman year, where we really bonded as we helped one another through the good and bad times, so it was like a hole was left in my life when we weren't together. I can be myself with these girls and tell them anything, something I had lacked for so long in a team setting. They make me happier every single day and I cannot imagine my life without them now. Had I never swum, I probably would have never met these amazing individuals, who have become my closest friends and biggest supporters, other than my family. In fact, I consider them my second family, and I will be forever grateful that the swimming world brought us together.

Swimmer 8

For me having a team with strong relationships is really important. I say this because in the last four years on my old team I have experienced both a divided and toxic team

environment and a very healthy and safe team environment. Thankfully I can say that the two most recent year has been on the positive side. I also will add that I was very lucky to go to the same school as everyone on my team, so we had a very close relationship, spending breakfast, lunch, passing period, classes, and car rides on top of practice together. Most of the time that wasn't even enough because we spent most of the weekends together as well. I think a large contributor to this was at least once a season we devoted an entire practice to discussing team goals, expectations for the group, and how we were going to lead the team. We also were past the point of just being teammates, instead, we had become best friends and or family to each other, supporting each other through the highs and the lows. Now I'm not saying that everyone on the team was the best of friends, but we all respected each other no matter our age, grade, what school we went to school, or gender.

Swimmer 9

My team has always been my family; I honestly spend more time with my swim team than my own family. I would go to school then practice and then go home, eat, do some homework, and then go to bed. But when I am with my team, I feel safe, supported, and loved, I know that they will have my back and that I will have their back. The most important thing I learned from my old team is that sometimes swimming is not the most important thing, it's about the connections and memories you make. As a world and society, we all get so focused on the smallest things and are very goal orientated, which is not a bad thing, but we forget to look at the beautiful world right in front of us. I think for most teams and myself some important values are respect, honesty, trust, kindness and compassion. No team is perfect, it shouldn't be expected that everyone is going to be best friends, that's simply unrealistic, but that doesn't mean you can't be kind or supportive still, like they are still your teammates. You just need to remember everyone is human and everyone has feelings and I've seen teams so divided, and it really just ruins the environment of the team. I do better, when the team is on the same level and it's just a happy place. And I also think it's so important, especially right now with covid. Trust is so important because covid is so unexpected and kind of stressful at times, but that's our life right and we just have to be smart but be truthful and honest with each other. But basically, team is important, and team is my boat, because I am learning to be comfortable with myself and learning to love myself, but for some reason it helps me having a team who I know has my back and is just happy.

Swimmer 10

People say I'm very outgoing (and I would agree, I like to talk and I'm not afraid to either), but I struggle to let my guard down and make real friends. However, I never really needed to because *sister* was and is my everything. We have no interest in talking about girl drama or whatever makes some women so passive toward one another, but we'd find joy in the most random activities and conversations. I remember one night we talked for hours about sleep and our dreams, and we discovered that we both have the same reoccurring dream. We also never seem to be doing the same thing, sometimes we're playing tennis in the middle of the street and other times we're trying to see who can slide across the floor the farthest on our stomachs. From day one, *sister* has been my best friend, teammate, supporter, and the greatest sister I could've asked for and that will not change. However, I've never had friends/teammates quite like the ones I have today. Each team I was on there was usually maybe one person I got along with well, but when I moved, we didn't seem to keep in touch. The most challenging team to join was the *former team* and I was counting down the days to leave it. I wanted a fresh start away from everyone on that team and I went from one good friend to a team full of them. Two girls in particular, make me the happiest version of me that there is. We will laugh for hours at the most ridiculous things, I never feel like I have to shy away from who I am, and I could spend every day with them and not complain. My whole class is important to me, and I am pretty close with all of them, but these two I just know were meant to go through life with me and I don't know how I got this far without them. I think my relationship with my teammates is what makes me love the sport so much. One of the biggest reasons I love coming to practice is because I get the opportunity to talk to everyone and hear about their days. Over our quarantined summer, I didn't go a day without face timing *teammate*, and if we missed a day, we made sure to call twice the next day. Any day I struggle to get out of bed, I think about my family and my teammates, and then I pick myself up because now I know that I have people in my life who love me and want me here, and they know that I feel the same way too. I'm so incredibly lucky and I don't even have the words to describe how much these girls have changed my life for the better.

Swimmer 11

Growing up my team was very much a community. It was a small town and pretty much everyone was on the swim team. Many of us attended the same school, were on the same

soccer teams, and parents ran in the same groups. This meant we spent most of our time together and were more than just a team. Some of these people have stayed in my life to this day, and many of them I will never forget because being with them is my childhood. I left this team in 6th grade, and I feel like that is just prior to when all team drama implodes. I am sure many of the older swimmers had problems within, but I was always just seen as the baby and all these memories and positive and happy. The next team I was on was again filled with strong bonds due to the number of hours we spent with each other. Traveling and training was always a fun time. However, the coaches created a competitive environment and truly pitted us against each other. There was 5 of us that all swam breaststroke at the same age and many times the coaches would compare us to one another and praise one over the other. This caused tension between us girls and although many of us were able to not let it get between us, it was not always perfect. I think the coach need to embrace how close we all were, in terms of speedy and friendship wise and better nurture the opportunity he was given. I think he really could have had a phenomenal training program that could of pushed us to be better. The parent drama in on this club team, and the whole coaching drama (the court case situations) really put a divide in the team. Different kids chose to believe different things and it was very much for and against this coach. It is sad to think that many of these people I no longer talk to because of some coach. By the end of my time of this team, it was no longer a team or a community. My final team, I honestly think the pain the coaches caused brought many of us together. We are still all close friends, and we really supported each other. The misery caused by the coaches was a bonding time. The community of this team was all outside the racing. Through competition, it was every man for themselves because we knew that if we did not perform, then we would be demoted. (We had a ranking system based off your top 2 events and where you were ranked in Canada and then the coach would average them. The top 18 averages got to be in the top group). This system the coach chose to do caused a lot of unnecessary tension between swimmers and performance as well as between swimmer and swimmer. I think it is important to understand that having a good team environment can help boost each person's success. Each person is different and sometimes comparing them to their friends has a positive effect, but I think it can also really hinder an athlete's mindset. I think it is important for a coach to understand how different people react differently to different things and that those can impact the overall team environment. This

year is much different than last year's team environment and neither is one better than the other. I think throughout the years I have always had good teammates, and perhaps we could have improved the team community better, but this team is just different. I like how in college swimming there is a sense of ownership that this is our team and people take pride in it. I think that is something we are really lacking in this year. I believe the newcomers on this team need to take pride to being in this team. They are not better or above anyone, no matter their speed. They need to understand that their actions reflect directly back to this team, and we do not want a poor name. We want to be able to embrace each and every one of them with open arms but when people are not adding the overall environment in a positive manner than we will not be happy. Teammates are lifelong friends considering they are in our lives so much. They are in all our memories, so I think it is important that there is a good community.

Swimmer 12

A team and community are defined by a lot of the same characteristics. A team really is just a group of individuals that come together to get to their common goal. I relate the word community as a deeper connection with a group though. Common goals and attitudes make up a community, but common interests and connections is really what sets it apart. Being able to open up and know more about the individuals is important in order for it to be comfortable enough to call it a community. Building the connections between one another makes it feel more special and like we are not only just grouped together as a team. Helping each other and growing with one another is community in the good times and the bad. A team does help individuals become stronger. I don't really think that a team necessarily sustains, nurtures, and grows through experience. It really depends on what team, but this team certainly does do those things. The atmosphere on this team is positive and caring. We have each other's backs and that is what the team has brought to my life.

Swimmer 13

I think a team changes into community when everyone does their part and becomes a unit rather an individual. Swimming is a sport that naturally an individual driven sport but when we all connect as one, it can make the team more fun and enjoyable. Even if we don't do the same things, we all still swim the same pool. It helps us become stronger because we know we have that reinforcement and comfort to let our guards down and breathe. Teams nurture

the sport by showing how even if you are completely different you can be one in the same. It proves that we can be so much more, when we are together.

Swimmer 14

Through my own personal experience thus far swimming for the University of Idaho at first being a freshman of course it was awkward, scary and nerve racking those first few weeks of practicing. Once we had our first race day Saturday practice and everyone started cheering for everyone and hyping each other up, to me that made me so beyond excited and helped me get through racing knowing I have a team to help cheer me on and get me through a race.

After that practice I felt our team became a community (meaning the freshman blending with the other classes). This makes me even more excited for future meets/ race practices to hear everyone cheering for everyone and helping each other out in and out of the pool. I know if this were any other year it would be easier to build those connections as a team community outside the pool. I feel as if our team is handling covid alongside building relationships very well and I'm so proud to be a part of this team and cannot wait to continue to grow as a community.

Swimmer 15

Well Mark, I'm pretty much an open book to you when it comes to my relationship with my current team and previous teams. I'm still working on trust with my counselor, but he told me that it takes a while for me to trust another due to my past.

What I learned from swimming on multiple teams is that it is not perfect. Each member on the team has strong personalities and they each also have strong personalities and flaws. These can be uncomfortable to some people because they're probably not used to that in their life. However, as a team we put these aside and because all of us have the same goals: 1) to make new connections with the people that we perform our sport in daily, 2) help ourselves and our teammates grow together through this journey, and 3) to perform our best in the pool as a team.

As a team, there are lots of people to create relationships with, but it's unlikely to form a close relationship with everyone. There are cliques in teams, individuals who hop around cliques, and then there's the group of two individuals that are extremely close. The group of two close individuals is where I categorize myself in. I'm just grateful that I have a best

friend on the team because my dad told me that it is rare for people to have at least one best friend in their life. She has been there for me through my worse times and my happiest so far in my college experience and I'm really lucky to have her support.

There are certain people who I like to be surrounded by. I definitely value hard work, determination, caring, support, honesty, and there might be more. Being surrounded by these people inspires me to grow into a better version of myself. For instance, I do get inspired by some of my teammate's leadership and I tend to learn from them so I can apply this skill when I get a job since my major involves teamwork. Another example can be when my teammates can swim longer distances, they're great IMers, and can handle extremely hard sets. I get inspired by that because I want to be as strong as them mentally and physically. In the past and I've encountered teammates who find easier ways out of hard practices, which I'm not a fan of. I'm the person who notices the smallest details and that helps me figure out who is actually telling the truth or not.

Swimmer 16

I love being part of a team. Being on a team is a huge part of what I enjoy about swimming as a sport. I value the relationships that I form with teammates very much and I take them very seriously. I have made some of my best and longest lasting friendships through swimming. I do think that good team relationships and dynamics are not always easy to attain and maintain. I think that the competitive nature of swimming can put a lot of strain on relationships, friendships, and team dynamics as a whole. I have struggled with the strain that swimming can put on friendships before, and it is always very difficult for me to navigate as I don't always approach swimming or view competitiveness in the same way as some of my teammates. This has been something that I have had to work on since high school. I think that team relationships aren't always super easy to maintain, but it is so worth it because I have made some of my best friends and learned so much about others through this sport. I have also learned so much about myself through the relationships that I have had on teams, both good and bad relationships have taught me a lot. Team friendships was a huge motivator for me to swim in college as I didn't want to lose the team family dynamics that I had consistently and relied on through high school, and I have not been disappointed!

Swimmer 17

A relationship with a team, even more so in swim, is one of the most important aspects to swimming in my opinion. There is no lie that swimming is an individual sport, but that doesn't mean that it doesn't have the team aspect. A team is a group of people that you can always lean on and count on to raise you up. The environment of a team is one of the best feelings I have ever felt. A team changes into a community when individuals can become alike and work as one. The supporting nature of a team turning into a community is felt by each athlete. I think you feel it most when you start to feel like you belong and are at a state of true happiness. Teams grow day in and day out. Through lifting each other up, a pat on the back or high five, cheering each other on, or even just a simple smile. Love and bonding grow throughout a team in more ways than one, and that is why I think a team is one of the greatest gifts that I have had in my life. Now being on a new team, things have been different and quite the change. Learning to adjust has been hard but I am finally feeling like I am a part of something special, and a loving team!

Swimmer 18

I feel like I talked a lot about my team last week and that's probably because as a leading part of my team there were being a coach was kinda part of my relationship with my coach. He took time to teach me how to teach because I was one of the people who brought and kept young kids on my team.

One of the main reasons I've kept swimming all these years is because of my team. Whether that be this Team my club team or even my high school team. In both my club and high school teams I had a different role but when things got hard, I had those people who needed me to be there and so it helped me stay committed to swimming. I had quite a few years where I was the only person from my team at futures and when I was alone like that, I did horrible. Team gives me something to distract myself from over thinking my races and it gives me the fun I need when things get hard. I definitely get a sense of fulfillment from serving a team and being a leader I have learned to put others first. It's nice helping people build confidence and in turn it helps me do the same.

I'm excited to see where I fit in on this team and excited for all the things we will accomplish together.

Swimmer 19

Being on a team has taught me so many valuable skills. I have experience both good and bad relationships with the teams I have been on. On one of my clubs teams I didn't have very many teammates that I had a good relationship with. A lot of my teammates wouldn't be happy for each other if they lost or wouldn't push each other to be better. This made swimming feel like a very individual sport and practice and meets felt like work rather than play. However, college swimming is much different than that and feels more like a team sport. When I swim here, I feel like I'm not only swimming for myself but for my team. I feel like I have a really good relationship with all my teammates which contributes to how success[ful] we are as a team. I would not be the swimmer I am today without training, competing, and having fun with my teammates every day. One trait that I value on my team is not only pushing yourself to do the best you can but encouraging each other to do their best as well. Even in practice swimming next to *teammate*, we push each other to be better every day. If I'm having a really good practice and she isn't or she is having a really good practice and I'm not, we are still happy for each other and want one another to get faster. Another trait I value on a team is being a "team player". There are going to be times you don't want to swim a certain event or do a certain set, but I believe a good teammate will take responsibility for their swimming and will want to do what will help the team be successful as well as themselves. Swimming has brought me to the best friends I have ever had. I've never been so close with any of my teammates before coming here. I used to always hate getting up for morning practices until now were coming to 6am practice is so much more fun when I get to smile and laugh with *teammate* before diving in. I value how supportive they are with everything I do both in swimming and out of swimming. I think of my teammates as more than just my team because once the end of my swimming career comes, I would like to believe I will still have just as strong of a relationship with them because of the experiences and memories we have shared.

Swimmer 20

Having a good relationship with your team is I think a fundamental aspect of any sport. As we had talked about before the difference between dance and grind and how sometimes swimming feels like just a routine and a job at times. Those times when it feels forced and you're not having the best time, your teammates are the ones who will be there for you, they

are the ones that are going to be able to understand what you're feeling. I have had years where I did not have the best relationship with my team, and it was very lonely. This year especially I have gained a closer relationship with a lot of people on the team, and it has become more than that. yes, we are teammates, but when we hang out, we have not once talked about times or really anything swimming related. These are people who understand you on a different level, they see you after a great race and they see you crying on the pool deck. Having a relationship with your team is important because what we do is something that the majority of people can't, and we would not be able to do it alone.

Swimmer 21

It can almost go without saying but team is an extremely important aspect of any program, but not necessarily make or break in my opinion. I haven't been on many teams throughout my life, but generally I feel that a team is there to be a second family and bring out the best in each other as friends and athletes. The first team I was on, *former team*, was essentially a feeder team. I have a lot of great memories of growing up on that team and it was really a family at the time. Despite it being a small, random swim and tennis club, it produced some extremely talented swimmers. Within the Portola valley where *team* was located, there were also many *other team* sites which I am sure you have heard of. If not its essentially a very well-known team of California due to its size and the mass amounts of fast swimmers that come out of their program. That being said it was pretty common for older kids to switch to *other team* when they got to be a certain speed. It was hard to watch a lot of friends go over the years and often times I would feel like it would never be the same without them. And honestly, I was right. It always did change the team dynamic and over time the team really withered away, and I even ended up leaving. That team had a lot to offer. Between the relationship of the coaches and the swimmers people really loved being there and it was always a hard decision when people chose to leave. So even though it was a really fun environment it was not the deciding factor to them. In a different instance, when I was on *Former Team* during high school, I had a huge falling out with a ton of people on the team. Due to the time old mistake of dating someone on the team, when we broke up a lot of people I thought were my friends showed some true colors and for a while there I felt pretty alone there, but I never even thought of switching. I honestly had all I needed then. I had a really good relationship with my coach and found different friends outside of swim and I was way

happier. In a final example, the *former college* team dynamic was quite something. As I've mentioned the team aspect was not the reason I left and envision myself continuing to be friends and stay in contact with a lot of them, and for the most part when I was there, we were all extremely close. But a lot of those close relationships stemmed from our upsets. I wouldn't trade some of those relationships I made for anything but looking back on it the team wasn't close for the right reasons and it added a level of toxicity to the pool deck. To tie this all together I am trying to point out that I think the best thing a team can be is balanced. A team is one aspect, but without others factors it can mean nothing. To specify in the instance of *former college*, without the trust and good relationship with coaches the team was not what it could be. We were so close but with that missing part, at least for me, it didn't work. I think what makes a team function comes from respect and a common interest. In all the teams I've been a part of it's been a big mixing pot of people with all different types of personalities, so I don't think it's a matter of certain qualities more so under the right circumstance a team can thrive and be supportive and fun together. And balance comes in so many forms which I think is why teams can be so unique. Balance of things like schedule, "play", hard work, attitude, etc. can all impact how successful a program can be and depending on people preferences and priorities can make sports teams in general really great ways to learn and have fun.

Swimmer 22

When I look at teams, I look for spirit, communication, cooperation, and motivation. I look for happiness, support, leadership, etc. When I was looking for a year-round club team, I was searching for those same characteristics which not every team had. It took a while to find one team that I thought would be perfect more me. One team, the coach didn't even seem interested in having me on the team, but the other one felt very inviting and open to anything. That team was the *former team*. They were extremely close, supportive, fun, and competitive. It took a while to open up to them as I was going from a club team to a year-round team. That team was amazing until drama started to come in and overtook the team. The team was no longer a "team" and was always negative towards others.

To me a team with fun and happiness will make anyone stronger. There's always that one person with the funness and joyfulness that will light up the whole pool deck (*teammate* :)). I love when teammates show laughter during practices or a meet because it can show that

practices can be fun, and they don't have to be so serious all the time. I also feel like a team with competitiveness and motivation is good. But too much competitiveness might not be so good for others and their selves. For me, I'm super competitive. Which I like but I am trying to work on not being so hard on myself. I feel that sometimes when I don't do well against someone, I tend to take the anger out on myself rather than just forgetting it and focusing on what to do better. I think that being competitive can only go so far until you start to feel like it takes over and you end up taking everything out on yourself or others...

Swimmer 23

Team is a super important aspect to swimming, even though it is considered and individual sport. Team has everything to do with how people swim. For me I really like an energetic, supportive, and loving team. Which is exactly what I have here at Idaho.

Yesterday when we were talking in groups *teammate*, *teammate*, and I were talking about competitiveness and how there can be a difference between being competitive with your teammates vs being competitiveness against another team. I think this was really good conversation to have because we all agreed that being too competitive with your teammates can cause animosity while being competitive with other teams can create bonds between your own teammates while cheering them on.

I've only been on one club team so I guess I don't have that much experience with different team environments, but *former team* could either be really really toxic, or really supportive. Everyone was so competitive between each other and if you won something the loser wouldn't talk to you for like a week. Yea when we were racing we would cheer for them, but only to beat the other teams and everyone secretly wished that they wouldn't beat your time. There was also a lot of cliques and people wouldn't hang out with people that wasn't the same speed as them because that was our lane groups and who we swam with the most.

Being teammates also looks really different in the pool than it does out of the pool. In the pool we all should encourage each other to swim better, and we have more fun if we talk and chat throughout swimming. Outside of the pool it's nice to have people who care for you regardless of swimming. It's like an automatic friend group in college.

Swimmer 24

To me a team is a group of people who help each other obtain a goal, sure there are other aspects that get them to that goal like going through hardships and triumphs together that play a key role in the culture of that team however the cut and dry ending is a team is a group of people trying to accomplish a certain goal. However, a community is a group of people who thrive off one another, while a community still has goals, there is no cut and dry end goal, and depending on the culture of the community they may not even have goals, or maybe the goal isn't something physically obtainable, maybe it is a better life, or something. A team changes into a community when there is a deeper understanding of one other. A team becomes a community when you do not just focus on the end goal and when people fall down you just have a short remedy to get them better until the end or something. A team becomes a community when you care about the goals you set as a community but care for one another more than the extent of to obtain the goal. A team becomes a community when the reliance of one another goes past the surface, on a team if one "falls off the wagon" the team can still function and move along, however in a community if someone falls off it hurts the community, and they have to learn how to move along. A team becomes a community when everyone plays a key role and if one person is missing the whole dynamic changes. A team is if a person isn't following the rules, you kick them out a community still includes the "creepy uncle" because while they still may not like or agree, he is still family and like I said earlier if he wasn't there the whole dynamic would change. A team is a group of people working together, a community is a group living and experiencing life together. Personally, I have never really "fit in" with a team because at my first real big club experience they had all grown up with each other and already had their own clicks and then at school all my friends had preferred polo, so we had grown apart. Don't get me wrong I still love every one of them and have extreme loyalty to them like a teammate and friend should and great respect for them, I just haven't gotten to experience the sustaining and nurturing description in the reflection instructions. I think we all have grown from the shared experiences, but I also see growth as inevitable.

Swimmer 25

To me, team is a group of people who work together to achieve a same goal. In swimming, we are a team of swimmers who are achieving a mutual goal of performing to the best of our

abilities. As a community, that means a group of people who live together in close proximity that have a particular characteristic in common. There is also the team community, which I believe we have as a swim team at UI. In my opinion, it is a bond that we share between the team members in our sport. Each team tends to have a characteristic that makes the team special. Since I am not physically with the team yet, I am not quite sure what it is, but I am beyond excited to learn what it is. Each swimmer also carries a characteristic that defines them that contributes to the team community. I believe that a team changes into a community when the team becomes involved in the community around them. The team is the center portion; however it turns into a community when there are more members to it that just a team. The team itself consists of the swimmers and coaches. It turns into a community when more people are involved so example: parents, athletic trainers etc. The community aspect is vital to the team environment as it only enriches the team portion. Without the community, the team would not exist. I think that the team environment is essential. Without having my team, I probably would not have an identity. My team back here at home has helped me discover my true personality and has been there for me every step of the way. I can't wait to be able to share my personality with the other girls on the team, and I hope that I am able to contribute lots to the team with my personality!

Week Ten: Relationship to Competition

Reflection Prompt:

On Monday, your coach began the week discussing competition in all its forms utilizing John Wooden's definition of success as the basis for this reflection. On Wednesday, we discussed each block that comprised Wooden's Pyramid of Success (Wooden & Jamison, 2005). On Friday, we asked you to write your fears about competition onto a paper without your name and we discussed them as a group.

When you joined your first swim team as a young athlete, competition was fun. Describe your earliest memories of the fun and joy of competition as a swimmer. Reflect on times in this pool when "competition" brought you joy. What are the similarities between the two "lived experiences?"

Swimmer 1

Overall, this weekend was lots of fun! Over the past couple of years, I always dreaded swim meets because I thought they were stressful, and I would always compare my results to

others. However, from taking such a long break from competing I realized that swim meets were more to gain an insight of where you are at in your training rather than always getting best times. This weekend I experienced what a team is like, meaning cheering for teammates and staying for all the sessions. On my club team my distance events were always at the end of the day, so all my team left and it was really cool to have all my teammates there. Over the past months, I have also not been motivated or set goals as much as I used to, and this meet allowed me to reflect on my swimming and attitude after my races. Swimming wise I really need to work on my kick and endurance in practices. Attitude wise, I realized that I need to be patient with my performances because everyone is different and not to compare myself. I also did not beat myself up for adding time or getting last, instead I focused on what I can improve on in practices and competitions. I had lots of fun this weekend, and I hope we have another meet this weekend!

Swimmer 2

Overall, this weekend for me was not about my performance or about my times. My whole goal for the meet was to have fun, not to overthink my races, and just go into my races knowing that whatever happens, happens and I should just be thankful that we are having a meet right now. This weekend was so fun and really brought back a love for the sport that I may have lost along the way with competition. I started to feel like how I felt when I was younger, not caring what my times were and just racing to get my hand on the wall first, which is what I did. Swimming well was kind of a plus, but I know that if I didn't go the times I went this weekend I would have been just as proud of myself as I am right now, which is saying a lot compared to how my attitude and mentality was last season around this time. I have grown mentally as an athlete and have realized all the torture I would put myself through when it finally got to competition day. I would put so much pressure on myself to swim a fast time or go a best time that when I didn't, I considered myself an awful swimmer and told myself that I wasn't good enough. I know now that saying that stuff doesn't help me grow it pushes me back 5 or more steps from where I want to go.

Part of the prompt had to do with experiences when we were younger, and this meet was the first time that I could say that this was similar to how I was competing when I was younger. The 500 free was a race that really showed this aspect; when I called my dad after my race the first thing he said to me was that this was the first race he has seen in a while that

reminded him of how I used to race as a kid. He said that he has noticed lately that when I have been swimming the last 100 or even 150, I have almost died out but this time I was able to bring it home in the last 100, that was my specialty when I was a kid. I think this kind of came out of me because I was racing, I wasn't trying to pace the whole time. I saw her creeping up on me and slowly pass me and I wanted to win so my goal was to just get my hand on the wall with all the energy that I had left. Same for the 1000, I wanted to win that, and I did with also that being a well-paced race for me.

I could write so much about this weekend and how much it has changed my relationship with the competition, but I think my attitude and how I carried myself showed it all. I think I am back in the right place, and I am ready to rock any meet that we have this season. You have helped me tremendously get to this point, I would not be here without your support and wise words to get me back to where I used to be. I can't wait to get better and better. And now regarding times, I am really proud of all the times that I swam over the weekend with all of them being right on what I went towards the end of the season last year. I can't wait to see what I will go tapered and after a couple more months of good training.

Swimmer 3

My relationship with competition has created the highest high and the lowest lows for me. From sleepless night of nerves to the greatest feeling in the world after a big meet, every single emotion is part of this sport. When I talked to you after my 100 fly this weekend I was feeling like I have felt for a while now during competition and I could not grasp the concept of why this horrible feeling kept creeping up after every race. The feeling that I cared too much to let this swim go and that if I cared enough maybe something would change in myself to become a better competitor and athlete not just during practice. You made complete sense when you said it was the swim or the time but more the feeling. That horrible feeling of not being tired but knowing you couldn't push any more. It's hard to put a description too and it has dug so deep into my brain that I take action around it subconsciously now. Even though competition has given me some horrible weekends it has also taught me to be strong, finish hard, every day is a new day, and to continue positive energy to keep the mood light and exciting for other competitors around me. Competition has brought me so many amazing friends that sometimes I hate racing but I know it will be a good race no matter what because they always bring their "A"

game, creating an opportunity for me to step up the plate as well. My end goal this year is to be able to swim well while I'm tired but in a way that my body is being taken care of and my mental health is also a priority. I will not be able to do this alone but just being in practice these last few months has completely turned my attitude around from not wanting to be anywhere near water to enjoying practice and being part of a team again.

Swimmer 4

As I reflect on this weekend's competition, I like to think of the times I spent with my teammates. I felt especially bonded to the team this weekend, being that we all got to mingle and share our love for racing together. It was neat getting the chance to talk to some sophomores and first-year students and getting to know them a little better. Due to the pandemic and our segregated practices, I feel like I haven't gotten to know a lot about some teammates. I think getting the chance to collaborate as a team made us perform better and appreciate that we get to compete. I know I swam better because my team was behind me throughout my events. Despite the three-lane difference between the opposing teams' swimmers and me, I still found confidence and comfort in my racing abilities because of the support I received from my fellow teammates.

Swimmer 5

This weekend meant a lot for me. Not only did I think of it as an opportunity to show my teammates how I want to be a part of them and help our team grow. I don't want to be a negative aspect or drag them down so I hoped to show them that I am trying to be the best that I can be. I think that it was super cool that my attitude could remain positive and optimistic although I didn't swim my best. I think this meet showed me what I need in my training and how to move forward with each event. It was so mentally exhausting but watching others swim and try their hardest no matter the time made me so inspired and excited for the rest of the season. Purely based on performance, I know although it felt good to try and race again, I have so much that I know I need to fix and work on. It's frustrating that I have to get back into it again, but I know that it will come as long as I keep focused and believing in myself. Although I'm not as close to my best times as I would like to be, I know how much heart and soul I put into myself in order to get those times, so, I know that I can do it again it's just going to take time and patience. I think that my mental health has grown through the meet though. After every swim I was able to have a fresh start for the next and I

didn't beat myself down which is a positive aspect that I'm proud of myself for having this weekend. I'm excited for the future of tough training and trying to get my strokes back to where I feel confidence in them again. I think overall besides the nerves, it was a great first meet for everyone and I hope that my teammates and I keep getting better as the season goes on.

Swimmer 6

When I was young, I liked going to meets because I thought it was fun and I would get prizes from winning, and I would go to the concession stands to buy candy/muffins. There is no pressure when you are a kid, so I just raced because I liked swimming. I liked talking with other people and that is similar to how I feel now. There is a different atmosphere when it comes to meet days that I like. I feel like I talk to a lot more people than I normally would. I also love cheering for my teammates and seeing them succeed.

I'm truly am grateful that we are having a season this year and that we got the opportunity to race another team. Other people don't get the experience that we do, so I'm going to make the most of it count. And whether or not there is WAC this year, I will still be grateful for the opportunity to at least dive in the water and train every day. I'm glad that we had this meet because I got a new perspective on racing and that helps me mentally. Swimming is mentally hard, and I struggle a lot with that but I think that being in the water this weekend helped me with that aspect of racing.

Swimmer 7

I've always had somewhat of a rocky relationship with competition. While of course I use others to motivate or push me, I've always been more competitive with myself. I strive to be the best I can be in the pool, in the classroom, and in all other aspects of my life. I wouldn't trade this trait for anything because having this mindset makes me a better person, but sometimes, this trait does backfire a little bit. When I know I could have done better or I did not reach my desired goal that I worked so tirelessly for, I am often frustrated with myself. I try not to blame others or factors I can't control for my frustrations, but this usually means I beat myself up internally instead. I have faced this problem for as long as I can remember. Year after year of swimming, coaches have told me to "not be so hard on myself" or to "stop getting in my own way" for being too invested in what the clock says after a race. I have tried many different methods on improving my relationship with myself from a

competitive standpoint, but I think I may have finally had a breakthrough this weekend, when perhaps it seemed like the most unlikely time to do so. Due to COVID-19, I— like almost all of my teammates— have not been able to compete since February. During this period of time, I have tried to tell myself that I am lucky that I even get to practice, or that swimming is not the most important thing in the world, especially at this moment. And while those things might be true, I didn't realize just how much I missed racing until this meet. Even though my times weren't necessarily where I would have wanted them to be under normal circumstances, I simply had a blast just being in that competitive environment again. In fact, I hardly even cared about the numbers reflected on the scoreboard; I was just grateful to be in a race suit, up on the blocks, and swimming against other passionate athletes from *Opposing Team* who just wanted to do the same thing. Those tiny numbers, who for so long have dictated my reactions to and emotions about swimming, were no longer the most important thing to me in that moment and I was able to take in everything else going on around me instead. It was incredible to see a smile on everyone's faces (when we weren't wearing masks of course) and watch us come together as a team, despite all of the challenges we have faced over the last eight months. It was incredible to talk to my parents and friends on the phone after the conclusion of the meet, listening to them say how exciting it was to finally watch an athletic event again, even if it wasn't in-person. It was incredible to have the support of my coaches, community, and school behind me as we hosted an event, we weren't sure would be able to happen again for a very long time. This meet was so much bigger than my performance; it was a huge step in the right direction from an athletics standpoint during the crazy reality we are currently living in. This experience made me realize that in swimming, ups and downs will come, but when the ups like this meet do come, I need to enjoy every second of it, regardless of the times I put up, because they do not define me. By no means was the meet perfect, but to me, it couldn't have gone much better.

Swimmer 8

My very first swim meet was for summer club when I was 8 years old and I can honestly say I don't remember much about the actual races or even getting on the blocks, but I do remember playing cards with my teammates and messing around in the heating area. The same can be said about some of my first few meets on club, with the people being what I remember not necessarily the races themselves. However, when I think about the meets or

races that have brought me the most joy the first one that comes to mind is high school state. The energy in the building and the team I was a part of had a lot to do with this, and I think this contributed to a good head space going into the meet and ultimately produced some of my best swims ever. Comparing this to this weekend I think the team environment was positive and encouraging, with little to no negative self-talk occurring between teammates. I think that this significantly contributed to every single person walking away with at least one swim they could be proud of. For my personally, I feel that this weekend provided a very good starting point for me for the rest of the season, giving me an idea of what I need to work on in practice in order to prepare for the conference in February. All in all, it felt good to start competing again and it made me realize some of the things I was missing about not only our sport but the world in general.

Swimmer 9

I remember my first race ever on a club team. I was 4 years old, and it was at the local swim club in San Miguel De Allende. It was the 25 meters free, and I was racing another young swimmer, in fact I still have the video of my race! It was supposed to be freestyle, but it really looked like some mutated hybrid version of all four of the strokes. But in that moment, all I was thinking was race this little boy and don't drown, just make it to the wall. The time I went wasn't in the galaxy of my thoughts, I just wanted to finish fast and first. And that mentality lasted for years, every time I stepped onto the blocks, it was just race *swimmer's name*, race the people next to you and finish first. I wasn't thinking about the times, the times just came to me naturally, because I was so focused on racing. I was like this for years, but then I started to get older, I started to mature, I was getting more serious about my swimming career and my racing changed. Racing stopped being fun and just race to having to reach a certain time and if I didn't then I am a failure or I am never going to be fast again. It's so weird how my racing mentality changed so fast, it went to race to get stressed out before every race and do bad in all my races. I know I get very anxious before test and races, and sometimes I don't know to just let go and breathe, I feel my body tense, my legs and arms shake, my chest gets tight and my stomach hurts, my brain tells me I can do it, but then it also tells me I can't do it, I think about whether my coach or my mom is going to be upset with my race. And while filling my head with these stress filled thoughts, I forget to race, I forget to do what I do best and that is to go fast. So, for the past few years I didn't like to

race, because I would feel so gross before and afterward, I forgot the thrill behind the race. And there were a few times where I would feel successful, and I would get those cuts and I'd get glimpses at what it means to race those moments were rare. I was getting better at hyping myself up and trusting myself, but then covid hit. My world stopped, school, swimming and my social life stopped. It sucked, I was miserable, I missed the pool and my team, and I missed going to school, I just missed the normal life. But I also think that quarantine was the best thing that could have happened to me. For the sole fact that I had to slow down, my world stopped and for once I could breathe and I got to smell the roses. I was talking to a friend the other night and I asked them, "if you could go back to March 12th, before quarantine, would you?" They answered yes, and explained their reasoning, which was a very valid and there is no wrong answer to this question, but then they asked me the same question. And I thought about it and answered no. Do I wish we didn't have to social distance and not wear mask and be able to live a "normal life"? Absolutely. But this break made me realize how much I love swimming and how much I love racing, what is my life without swimming. And during this break I created some amazing memories with my mom, my family, the few friends that I saw, and my passion and fire for swimming was reignited and I couldn't be more excited to continue to race. This was the first meet in 4 years that I walked into with the mindset to just race, to have fun with it, and what I do right now is the best I can do right now and all I can do from this base line is improve. Yes, I did get a few nerves before some of my races, but that's normal. But I felt proud of myself, and I think I am on the verge of a breakthrough with my swimming. And I feel really happy with my swimming right now, like swimming make me happy, and I missed that feeling of being happy and ready to race. So, I can say that I have a lot to work on, but I am excited to work on my swimming and discover myself as a new swimmer. I sometimes can be a little impatient, but I understand that this process is going to take some time, but I am honestly ok with that, I'm just excited and so beyond thankful that I get to swim, practice and race, because a lot of teams don't get to do what we're doing right now. So, thank you Mark, for these journals which are helping me discover myself as a swimmer, and I think that these are really helping me improve, for giving me the opportunity to swim, to race, and to find my joy again.

Swimmer 10

Competition just recently has become something I really enjoy. Growing up I was never considered fast, and I always dreaded going to meets because I knew I wouldn't do as good as the other swimmers or be recognized in any sort of way. It has always been so frustrating for me because I felt like I grew up watching everyone around me be naturally good and not have to put in a whole lot of work. I still see it to this day and sometimes it is so hard for me to understand why I work so hard and not get anything out of it or to see the people who don't work hard get everything handed to them on a silver platter. This seems so harsh reading back and I do believe that everything happens for a reason and that things will eventually catch up with people, but it starts to get really tiring. I think a big reason I have started to discover myself more is because I learned that I don't really want to care this much about things I have no control over. Relaxing and realizing that life can be more fun and doesn't need to be so serious, has made me enjoy the water and competition so much more. To be honest, I think because I was never really recognized for swimming or school, it made it easier to not stress so much about racing or getting good grades. It didn't and doesn't matter to anyone else, it only matters to me. I've learned how to coach myself and now it's much easier for me to know what I did good, what I need to work on, and the new things I need to start focusing on in practice. I'm always learning something new about myself in competition, and it's more about having fun than it is about beating myself up because I'm not good enough for the people around me.

Swimmer 11

It can be said that competition is when two or more individuals or teams compete for one common goal. It becomes a competition when only one gains something from the activity while the other loses. However, many valuable lessons can come from losing. Does anyone ever actually lose in a competition if you look at competition with a different mindset? Growing up, I trained in a 20-meter pool, this meant no competitions were ever a home meet, but at the end of the year, the outdoor pool would open and we would be able to have our last meet of the season at home, outside and in 25 meters. This meet was always the most fun. It was one session for all swimmers, and everyone would put up tents around the outside of the pool deck. During the lunch breaks each team would compete in cardboard boat races, lip-sync contests and other games. The memories surrounding this meet are happy

ones and would be by far the favorite meet memories I have. It is hard to find similarities between our past meet this weekend and that meet as I am just in such a different place in the sport. In sport we are taught to set goals, many of these goals are surrounding results you achieve in competition. They are benchmarks we believe that define success, but that is not the truth. Competition can be used for much more than just reaching those goals and trying to find what people believe is success. We can use competition to learn our strengths and weaknesses, as well as bring teams closer together. I think this weekend we were finally one. Although the meet felt more like two inter-squad meets running side-by-side, we still found ourselves being a team. We learned how to support each other, where we might lack, and how we can be better. Competition surrounds us everywhere. It is important not to shy away from it because it will be in all aspects of your life, for the rest of your life. If you do not allow competition anxiety to overtake you, you will be able to motivate yourself past mediocrity. I think that sport competition has better prepared me for the real world. I know what hard work is. I know that there is always something else to achieve and someone who will be better. Applying this to real life means that in the workplace, I will know that nothing will always go your way. Hard work is required, but getting that raise, or being the best does not make you successful. You can learn when you fail. This weekend was hard. Many of the difficult aspects are not something I could control, and rather than focusing on the flaws, I just tried to enjoy the fact that we could be competing. Sometimes you just have to take what life gives you and run with it.

Swimmer 12

No response

Swimmer 13

Competition brings me joy in only certain experiences sadly when I was young. I wasn't happy unless I was either dropping or if my mother said I did good. I had no self-validation or self belief in myself and my own abilities. However, I've grown since then. I did take some time in with a sports psychologist, I figured out then in order to truly appreciate the thing I've devoted so much of my time to I needed to swim for myself and my own goals rather than others. This weekend was a good reflection of this. I set goals for each of my races and hit each one because I knew I could achieve them.

Swimmer 14

This weekend was my first collegiate swim meet. It obviously was not running the same as a normal dual meet considering we're in the middle of a global pandemic, but I was so happy to be a part of this weekend's competition and it was the first step into getting back into the rhythm of competition and becoming one as a team. When I was younger competition to me was fun because of all the team spirit and cheering. Club swimming is hard sometimes as you get older because you have the high school kids who just want to swim and leave. This weekend reminded me of the joy in competitions with all the cheering and team spirit. It gets me excited to continue to race and be a part of this team.

Swimmer 15

No Response

Swimmer 16

Competition has always been really important to me. Competition is what motivated me to keep swimming through my younger years and continues to be a huge motivation for me. I think one thing that made this last weekend so special was the fact that it has been so long since I had been able to compete last. I had definitely forgotten what it felt like to actually compete. It was strange for me at first because, in all honesty, I was not looking forward to racing all that much. I was definitely excited to finally have the opportunity to race, but the idea of a multiple session meet, suiting up, and racing some events that I hadn't swam in a LONG time wasn't that appealing, but once the meet started, I quickly remembered why I love competing and how much fun meets are. Competition is something that has always brought me joy because it often reconnects me with the sport and also people that I love. I got to spend time with some of my teammates that I don't get to spend a lot of time with, which was great. Competition also gives a reason to reconnect with a lot of my family and friends; I got a lot of texts and calls from family members that I haven't spoken to in a while who watched the live-stream or who read some articles about the meet. I love that aspect of competition because it reminds me of how many people I have supporting me and cheering me on. It's not always as easy to remember that during practice, but during competition it is hard to miss.

Swimmer 17

Finding joy in competition was always hard for me. I used to get so nervous, to the point where I would sike [sic] myself out and even throw up before every race. I couldn't find joy when I was so nervous, and I actually dreaded it more than had fun with it. Recently though, and even more so this past weekend, I have really started to find joy in competition. I realized that stressing over competing did me more harm than good. My first college meet really opened my eyes to my love for competing. I found joy in cheering for my team, sitting side-by-side with my friends, and knowing that they have my back when it is my turn to race. It really didn't matter to me whether I did good or not. I was of course going to try my hardest, but what really mattered to me was fully becoming part of a team. I am overly pleased with how this weekend went as a whole and it really helped me to find more joy in competition.

Swimmer 18

I began swimming later than most kids did. I was a bit more aware of my early days of competition than maybe the kids who started swimming when they were 6. My first meet was a long course meet at the Mt. Hood CC pool. I remember being in absolute awe of the other swimmers and the size of the gigantic pool. I loved swim meets when I was young, the Gator cheers, the "eat my bubbles" written in sharpie across my back. These things along with the games we would play during warmups and the countless hours I spent in hot pools laughing with my teammates are what I remember best. I don't remember the stress or nervousness I was prone to when I was young, and I certainly don't remember my times. There are some very specific times I can remember my love for the race. The first time I went a 57 in the 100 back was such a rush, but when a race goes well for me, I don't usually remember anything about it. But that race was fun and exciting, and I was really in flow for the tiny 14 yr old I was. The other times I felt that true desire to race usually came with relays. I do well with the high energy setting that relays bring; it would always just click for me. As I got older, I began to lose that fun a little, last year was probably the first time in a long time that I began to enjoy meets again but specifically enjoy racing again. Right before covid hit I went a 2:11 in the 2 back and while it was the fastest I'd been sense I was 14 it was also just a fun race. I have a lot of baggage that comes with backstroke so the fact that I thought the 200 back was fun was a really big win for me.

Like with this past weekend by far my favorite event was the 200 back. My 50 free was probably a better race but the 2 back was just fun. I loved feeling like a part of a team again even though it was in a weird setting.

Swimmer 19

In the past I would get really nervous and stressed behind the blocks before competition. I would overthink every little detail about the race I was about to swim and everything that could go wrong would come to my mind. This took away a lot of the fun that competition was supposed to bring. There was a period of time in the beginning of high school that I was getting really discouraged and frustrated because I felt like I was training so hard in practice but then it wouldn't show in meets. However, this year I feel like something clicked in my training and I feel much smoother in the water. This has helped my confidence in myself a ton and I have been trying to let go of the stress and pressure and just race for the fun of it because it is what I love to do. This has shown this weekend because I had some good and some bad races, but I've learned that even if my time may not be great, I can still find something I did good and can benefit from. This weekend helped bring back my love for competition not only for my individual races but seeing the whole team all together and cheering on the side of the pool makes me so happy. Even though the meet was a little different from a usual meet, we were still able to make the best of the situation and it reminded me how lucky we are to even get to compete at times like this.

Swimmer 20

Competition is a weird thing. I don't believe that I have either a good or bad relationship with it. I know that when I was younger, and even through high school I could go a best time every meet. Every prelims-finals meet I would always go faster at night. That was just what I was used to, and therefore competition was fun. Now, it still is fun, but now I try to almost not think about the competition. I will always try my best and give it my all, but after its over I will do everything to not think about it because it was most likely not what I would have wanted to see. I don't know when this changed. I'm not sure when I started allowing the simple aspects of a sport have so much power over me. Even now, I do not have a bad relationship with competition, I feel as if it has gotten less serious in a way. I will always do what I can to have a good race, but now I am trying to focus on the memories of the meet or

the team because two years from now those are the things that I will remember, not my times.

Swimmer 21

I'd consider my feelings toward competition to be a bit of a love hate relationship. When I was younger, I was a lot more competitive. Everything had to be a race or a challenge. I'm not sure where it really changed but overtime, I adopted mass amounts of self-criticism. Ever since I was young, I always felt like people were really easy on me. My parents have never been super strict and surprisingly never put a ton of pressure on me in any way really despite their positions. Competition for me is so much more of an internal battle than an external one. I've made myself to be really hard on myself since no one else would be. It's a weird thing to dislike I guess but that's always bothered me. I would so much rather receive real critiques rather than sugar coating comments. So going back to competition when I race people that are a lot faster than me, I tend to get a bit overwhelmed because often times I feel like I am the only one actually pushing myself, which is what I refer to when I say I've lost a bit of my competitive edge. I just want people to be honest with me and maybe that's me being dramatic, but competitions sometimes feel like a false notion of how well I am doing. In a previous journal, I mentioned that I always feel like I can do better even when I have a good race and I think it's because I so badly want to be more than how the competition makes me feel. I feel a lot of times, especially in dual meets (even since high school), my swims are just painfully average. Don't get me wrong I do love to race. There is nothing like the feeling of having such a good race that you feel like you could go forever, but I think for me personally I need some extra tough love to feel like someone else believes that I can be better too. That all being said I think this weekend was quite a different experience for me racing. I felt like collectively the girls were all part of something bigger than individual races. I think this weekend involved a lot of bonding which made competing really fun. I think my best races almost always come when I am not too serious taking things too seriously and from everyone just being happy to be there and happy to be at a meet it made it really easy to be present and enjoy that. And going back to Wooden's talk, this weekend was really successful for me in a lot of ways not even regarding performance, although I was pleased for the most part since I had just been out. I think getting to race at all was a win and generally just swimming stronger and finally not feeling dread associated with races. You pointing out that

no race is a throw away race really stuck with me because that's what a lot of last year felt like which caused a lot of dislike towards racing some of the events that I used to love. I really enjoyed working hard a feeling like my swimming was worth something. Again, I hope to do a heck of a lot better time wise and I know I can, but feeling like a real part of this team this past weekend was enough for me to feel valued and successful.

Swimmer 22

This past weekend was a load of fun while also being competitive. I loved being able to see the interactions between the freshman and upperclassmen instead of half a pool being the freshman and the other half being the upperclassmen. I loved being able to race even when it's during a pandemic because all I thought was "well at least we are able to race". I cared about my races but at the same time I kept thinking... "whatever happens happens, just have fun!" Yeah, it was a little nerve wracking as I haven't swam some of these races in what feels like forever, but it was still fun and after I finished those races, I was just happy to have swum them. There are some similarities from when I was young and raced. As a kid on my rec team, I loved racing. I was a really good swimmer as a kid and my coach loved coaching me. I would do whatever it took to get that first place as a kid. This past weekend I would give it my all, exactly what I did as a kid. Getting that blue ribbon as a rec swimmer was exhilarating! That blue ribbon meant a lot and continued to help me improve throughout the years.

Swimmer 23

No Response

Swimmer 24

No Response

Swimmer 25

The one competition that brought me joy was probably Canada Games in 2017. I can remember that whole month so vividly. The meet itself was a week-long, but even prior to that, we had a 2-weeklong training camp. The reason that this specific competition sticks out for me was that I have never experienced a swim meet like this. I also think it was because I had hit rock bottom for the past year in terms of suffering from my coach. Having the Canada Games experience and learning that there are coaches and swimmers out there that actually care about my feelings was such an eye-opening moment for me. I never thought coaches

were supposed to care about how I am doing because that was not how I was raised. As sad as that sounds, that is how it was for 5 years of my life. My teammates actually got up to cheer for my swims, to congratulate me after, to console me when I did not perform as well as I wanted to. To me all of this was not normal, even though to some, this was how their swim career was their whole life. The most memorable part was probably winning two bronze medals for BC, and creating bonds with other swimmers and athletes that I know will last a lifetime. Even though swimming should be about the swimming aspect, I think the social aspect is just as important. Having teammates and coaches that care about you and your life is so important. And just having friends on the team, people who understand the hardships of swimming, that is oh so important. With my current team, we are very open with each other, and we are all very close-knit and I believe that to be important. This past weekend, unfortunately I was not able to race in Moscow, we had a mini time trial that was unofficial, but it was nice to suit up and see how fast we could swim. I also love racing against my teammates; since they are all boys, it's fun to kick their butts and make fun of them for losing to a girl. Racing Sunday night was such fun; not only was the swimming portion satisfying, but also being social with my peers, watching them get up and cheer for me and vice versa. I miss having the team racing environment as it is much different than the team training environment. I also swam surprisingly well for that one session we had. I swam 400 free and went a 4:29 SCM, which is not too far off my best time. 15 minutes later, I got up and swam 200 Fly and went 2:22 SCM, which in my opinion is pretty amazing for me. I absolutely suffered that last 50 of the 200, but I pushed through and ended up with a solid time. The 400 free was really fun to me; I have not swum anything distance-y in a while, so getting up and swimming that was great. Not only that, but I was racing two of my best friends on the team, and even though they almost lapped me, I still had a smile on my face. I genuinely thought I could beat one of them since he is not a distance swimmer but wow he did amazingly well. Getting up, putting our suits on and racing was so important for us this Sunday. I genuinely forgot what it was like to race, and I was so happy that I was able to compete even in a small time-trial. I can't wait for the rest of the season, as I feel optimistic that I will be able to accomplish great things!

Week Eleven: Joy and Happiness

Reflection Prompt:

At the beginning of the week, your coach talked with you about the many moments of joy and happiness that have occurred over the past ten weeks of your swim season. Some of these experiences were with competition but many were not. On Wednesday, we returned to reading *Why We Swim* to remind us about our choice to return again and again to our “dance” with the water. On Friday, your small groups shared one joyous thing with the rest of the team.

Our weekly reflections have brought you time and again back to your experience in the water. Our experiences, like a wave, have both crests and valleys. In order to feel joy, we also must experience pain and sadness. Yet, you still love the water, and you love swimming. Describe this ebb and flow of happiness and heartache with your *being-in-the water* and take us on your path toward joyous swimming.

Swimmer 1

Since quarantine (before coming to college), I realized why swimming brings me joy and happiness. In April, my best friends and I would wake up early and swim in a pond near our houses, it was super cold, so we wore wet suits and the pond was full of geese which tried to attack us. Despite, some of the circumstances I had lots of fun with my friends swimming the perimeter of the pond and it was probably the most memorable thing I had done while in quarantine. I also reflected a lot on what I want to do/what makes me the happiest in quarantine and it came down to a couple of things: traveling, swimming, and helping others. These things I can do throughout my whole life, and they have made me who I am and I will always be learning from these things. With swimming, I thought I had a love/hate relationship (mostly hate at the time) but I imagined my life not swimming and it seemed like a world I would not want to live in. The things that did not make me enjoy swimming were my times and bad practices/races which are inevitable. However, I enjoy swimming because it makes me feel accomplished at the end of the day and I have met the best people through it. I have come to realize that the happiness swimming brings overpowers the things that did not bring me joy. I also have control over the things that do not bring me joy, which I do not necessarily have with the things that bring me joy and happiness. I think that the idea of

improvement and the feeling of accomplishment brings me back to swimming everyday because it makes me feel the most fulfilled.

Swimmer 2

The water has always been my escape and it has been a place for me to relax and let my mind wander away from the stress of everyday life. Swimming brings me a lot of different emotions, one of them mainly being joy and happiness. The uncertainty of this season and the year, in general, made me think about the sport in a different way. I never understood how much this sport played a role in my everyday life; during quarantine, I was going crazy because I wasn't able to train and wasn't able to get into the pool in general. I was actually going insane and resulted in creating a belt for myself to swim in my pool, I used a ski rope and my mom somehow figured something out for me to swim in place. This was not the same as swimming down a pool and following that black line, but it was the only thing I was able to do at that moment. Just swimming in place for an hour calmed my mind and took me away from the COVID drama and took my mind off of the world. Coming back here I was nervous about how our season would look; I was scared that we would end up not swimming certain weeks because of closures or because of quarantines and we would never really get fully back into shape or fully back into competition season. But all of those did not happen; we have been extremely lucky. I think the reason why our team hasn't tested positive is that we all love what we do, and we are here to swim and have a season. We are not going to do anything to jeopardize that, I also think another reason is that we all respect each other. We don't want to be that one person to cause our team to shut down.

Away from that, I have never always had the best relationship with the sport. Swimming and I have had our ups and downs, but I still go back to it. The past 2 weeks when we have raced, I have never felt happier with the sport. I have a new relationship with competition, and it really shows. I am just lucky every day to dive into the pool and train and I am extremely grateful to dive into the pool for an official race against another collegiate team. I am diving into every race like it could be my last and instead of getting hung up on what my time is I am looking at what I could improve upon or what I did well within the race. That is how I wish I always looked at my races, but as club swimmers, your taught to drop time and if you don't drop it is because of missing practice or because you aren't training hard enough. We are all raised to look at times and now I am trying to move past all the years of doing that and

look at the positive within a race that could have been the worst time I have ever gone. The big takeaway for me this week is the happiness I now get from competition, I always had a joy for training and joy for swimming in general, but I never had that same feeling about competition. It would bring me stress and sometimes made me feel defeated but now I have done a 360 and now look at the joy in racing and the joy in competition.

Swimmer 3

I have found so much joy and happiness in this sport. It has given me a team, a family, countless memories, endless laughs and inside jokes, and most importantly something to look forward to every day. No matter how bad the day is, if I had practice to look forward to, I could let go of everything around me and just be in the moment. Just little competitions between me and my friends, the shared suffering of our bodies aching, but pushing hard then we every though we could to finish off practice strong. The tid- bits of conversation we would be able to exchange in the limited seconds we could get in between a set. The countless jokes that would make you laugh so hard you would choke on water when you pushed off the wall. Even in meets, especially team travel meets I have hilarious memories of stories being told at a team dinner or just while we waited for our events. Even thinking about this now more happy memories come back even from meets that may not have been the most successful competitively I can always pull a funny moment away from the overall outcome. Whether it be called a homeless camp at Washington open when the few of us lived under the stairs at federal way or joking about a hurricane during practice because we were so cold, and the wind was stronger than it had ever been. Little moments make it worth it in this sport. Without the little moments staring at a black line would get super old super-fast. But, when I swim now I don't even think of that. It's the idea that you can't wait to tell your teammates what happened over the weekend or how your day was. To jam out to a new song or dance on a Saturday practice because you can't feel your legs anymore. It about keeping this upbeat rhythm in your body and the teammates around you. To see someone who works so hard finally have everything pay off in a meet is even better than swimming well for yourself. It's the feeling after you swim a hard practice and know you got better, that rushing feeling in your legs where you know you did your job. That fills me with joy. When easy speed comes naturally, and you feel like you can fly.

Swimmer 4

This weekend I loved getting the chance to bond and connect with my teammates. I feel these past two weeks, I've gotten to develop and grow these new relationships into new friendships, and it brings me immense comfort, knowing I am swimming with my peers. I've realized that I have more in common with most of my teammates than I thought I would. Before coming to U of I, I struggled with connection, and the team I had swum on before, I feel like, was fueled by drama and lies. Since coming to Moscow, I have found that there are genuinely good people on this team and having these people on this team makes me proud to call myself a vandal.

Swimmer 5

Swimming has always been so up and down for me. Of course, I've always loved it but it's the hardest thing I've ever done. I love working hard and feeling accomplished after a hard practice, but sometimes I love just being there whether I'm having a bad day or not. Swimming allows me to think through my problems, my homework, and what's up next for me this month, day, etc. I've had times where the training just does not transfer over to racing. I have had times where I beat myself up so bad mentally because all the work I put in just didn't seem to pay off. It's always so nice to swim though. Somehow, I just keep going every time, and try my best, whether it works out or not. I have had so many challenges, just like anyone does in the span of their lives. My closest friends have always been swim friends and I find myself spending so much time with them in and out of the water. I always wondered why this was. This reflection made me realize that it's because no one else can understand what I go through besides them. They bring me so much happiness and help me to thrive in the water. I could never imagine swimming alone and my teammates help to make swimming what it is. I think that I get down on myself a little bit too often, but all of my issues are mostly mental. It's always so easy for me to see how amazing everyone else is and for me to see all their potential and how hard they work. Whereas for myself, I find it hard to know if I'm on the right track or if I'm even that good. I think that I always have a pretty positive mindset I just get frustrated or worried when strokes don't feel prepared or how I think they should feel. I always want to push myself to be my best and I find swimming extremely therapeutic. I find it hard to sometimes find a balance between races or a swimming to not define me as a person as I don't want to let anyone down with my swims.

Overall, of course I swim for my own joy and wanting of growth but sometimes it's hard to not let outside forces or the forces of my mind cloud my own visions of success and overall performances.

Swimmer 6

I'm really thankful that we got to compete the last two weeks. I thought everyone did a really good job cheering and supporting each other. I felt a lot of joy because I got to compete, and I gave it all I got. I'm really happy with my swims, not because of the times, but because it felt like I remembered how to swim again. At the intersquad meets, I remember doing the 100 breast and 200 fly and I couldn't believe that I used to race those events. A part of me thought I would never be able to go fast or be ready to race those events again because it had been so long. But after competing in two meets, I feel a lot more confident about myself and swimming.

Joy for me is a lot of things when it comes to swimming. I like going fast but I also like watching other people go fast too. I was watching *teammate* swim and she did such a good job competing, same with everyone else on the team. I like to cheer for other people and tell them they will do great in their races. When people say I did great in my races, that makes me feel good about myself.

I don't feel like writing about the heartache that comes along with swimming. I just want to focus on the joy and happiness that we all are experiencing right now.

Swimmer 7

People often think I'm crazy when I tell them my schedule: get up, go to morning practice, rush to class, eat breakfast during class, go to my next class, then the class after that, eat lunch, go to my second practice of the day, lift weights, come home, eat, shower, do homework, go to bed, repeat. To survive this demanding schedule, you have to be dedicated and persistent, but most of all, you have to truly love what you do. It's extremely hard to fake something you devote so much of your life to. I've seen many teammates of mine slowly lose the will to come to practice or do their homework because they are so tired from juggling everything competitive swimming comes with. While it's okay for some people to recognize they no longer have the passion to continue swimming at this level or the patience to balance all areas of life (school, sports, social activities, mental health, etc.), for me, this proves just how much joy swimming really brings me. I wouldn't necessarily choose this

schedule every day, and I certainly couldn't manage it if my heart wasn't 100% in it. I've missed out on countless social events with friends (even to the point of losing friendships themselves because they didn't understand), thousands of family dinners, and lord knows how many hours of sleep because of my demanding schedule. Sometimes, this is definitely a hard pill to swallow, but I wouldn't have it any other way. Swimming for me is worth the hardships that come along with it because when I succeed, that success is just so much sweeter. As the prompt says, to experience true joy, you also have to experience the devastation and sadness that come along with it. If I were to get on the blocks and drop time every time I raced, I would likely be less motivated to work hard and manage my crazy lifestyle. On the other hand, it can be especially discouraging to put in all these hours of training and hard work yet feel like you didn't get the results you wanted. The balance between these two powerful forces is what keeps me going and drives me to wake up and conquer each day again and again. Joy, however, is not just associated with winning or reaching a certain goal. While this certainly plays a part in my happiness in the pool, it is definitely not everything. Simple things bring me joy in the water too, like looking to my right and seeing a teammate smiling after winning a race, or the satisfaction I feel after completing a hard set, or the feeling of freedom I experience as I float up and down the lane. Once again, though these moments may not come often or seem that special, to me, they are worth every single second I put into this sport. There have definitely been some incredible lows involved with my swimming journey, but I have learned from those experiences and realized just how precious those moments of joy are. I am proud of the time I have devoted to my sport and happiness and joy resulting from it.

Swimmer 8

No Response

Swimmer 9

Joy and happiness, surprisingly this is the hardest journal I've had to write so far. Sometimes it's hard to write or talk about the joyous and happy times when you're sad and at a low point. In order to experience happiness and joy you have to go through those times of struggle, pain and sadness. Those are not easy or fun things to go through, but everyone will go through those dark times, and in the end, there will be a moment of shining light filled with warmth and happiness.

Some may find it easy to write about happiness and joy, but I am really struggling. To think about the value and meaning of those two things, I think about the hard times I had to go through to have those happy memories. To be honest, November is not an easy month for me, and it hasn't been for the past few years. November is associated with a lot of painful memories, times of sadness and hopelessness. November is the month where I grieve my dad, and I remember the time of how it felt to be truly lost and to be truly sad and unhappy and just miserable. So being here and not with my mom and my family is hard it really is hard it's hard for everyone. But even though this is a sad time, I can still say that I'm here. I'm here because I love swimming and the water is my comfort place my second home. I'm here because I love medical science and I want to be a doctor someday. I am here because I want to make my family proud of the person I have become. But most importantly I am still here on this earth because I fought, I fought hard and I realized that the comfort of the water, the feeling of racing, the small moments of happiness, my family, my friends, they were all worth the movements of misery. Because without those moments I wouldn't know the feeling of happiness or of joy. I wouldn't feel the water gliding over my body and connecting with it. Swimming is my happiness, and it feels good to feel that way again even though the rest of my life is kind of just sad right now. But swimming, the water was always there and always will be it is my safety it is part of my happiness. And I may not feel happy right now, and that's ok, I know I'm just at a low point, but I'll soon start the upward trend and reach another high spot. But it's sometimes so interesting to think how you sometimes have to go through hell to be happy.

Swimmer 10

This prompt doesn't take much for me to answer because I think in all the previous journals, I have discussed all the things that make me happy and joyous. The grind, the dance, my coach, and my teammates. Swimming has brought so many people into my life that I'm so lucky to have. This year I've finally decided to take my life into my own hands, and I think a big reason I have decided to do it, is because of this team. I know what I'm doing is going to make me a much happier and joyous person. I do find joy in swimming and competition, otherwise I wouldn't do it, but I think most of my happiness comes from watching my teammates succeed and having those interactions with people that not everyone gets to experience. Getting the opportunity to talk to people on the wall, even if it's just for a few

seconds, can change my mood instantly. I'm almost always laughing at practice and that wasn't always so. My current team is the reason I want to be a better version of myself. This past weekend, some of the *Opposing Team* girls made a comment about how they loved getting to meet new people behind the blocks. It made me so happy because that was, and still is, one of my favorite things to do at swim meets. Swimming brings together people that otherwise would have never met and because of Covid we have not been able to do this. It is unfortunate, but it also makes you appreciate what we're doing, what we have, and swimming just in general.

Swimmer 11

I believe that throughout my swimming career, I have experienced many crests and valleys. I have always loved being in the water, but many times coaches have taken away from this love. This sport has given me so many wonderful opportunities and I would never change any of the paths I have been put on. In grade 11, I lived with two different families and a roommate, who was my best friend. Things did not go well by the end of the year, obvious as I no longer speak with this girl. I really struggled in getting to and from practice and school, taking multiple city buses to get there, even going as far as running to a morning practice, over 10 kilometers. These times were so difficult and there are times I look back at them and wonder why I did this to myself for just a sport. There were so many weekends where I would cry to my mom about the situation I was in, and she would always say "you know that you can just come home" but that was never an option. And as I said before, sometimes I felt like I was only staying in the sport because I thought it was my identity. It was unfortunate that these were my thoughts and that I had to go through all this but coming out of it made me feel better about the sport in the end. It has helped me realize there is always joy in swimming if you look close enough. People look at swimming and see it as a boring sport. I mean, I do not blame them. I had this conversation with a friend back home yesterday about how it is a boring sport, and I will admit, it is. We swim back and forth up, following a black line. How exciting can that be. No one else will really see what joy it can bring if they aren't in our position. It is something we cannot explain. Swimming takes up so much of our lives and if you do not love it then you cannot do it. It is not something that can be faked and when your time comes to leave, you know it is your time. I have to say, I have come close to this limit a couple of times, but I am so glad that I am still standing.

Throughout quarantine, I spent a lot of time with my mom. Her and I have always been close but there was something about how we are that is just different. Obviously, everyone became different people through quarantine as it has never been anything like anything else people have experienced. It really made me find joy in the small things in everyday life. I was much more sad leaving this year to return to school then I was my first year.

I think it is really important for people to reflect on how each and every day there is something good in your life. You can always find happiness and joy in the smallest of things. In February, I was having a hard time mentally when it came to being happy with myself. I felt like I needed certain people in my life to make me happy, when in fact they were making my life more miserable. I did not want to feel like I had to rely on others to be happy. I know that it is okay to rely on others to bring you joy and happiness, but I just wanted to feel more content with my overall life when I was alone or when nothing big was happening. This is when I had decided at the end of each day that I would write down one thing that made me happy in the day. At times it was actions that other people did, and other times it was just a singular, small thought I had. I think taking the time to reflect and actually write something down made me realize there was so much more joy in life than I was previously noticing. More people cared about me than I thought, and I was really able to notice how things were able to make me happy in the smallest way. I truly recommend this to anyone who feels lost or unhappy. It really did open my eyes to a new and brighter light.

Swimmer 12

No Response

Swimmer 13

My joy in swimming started when I first discovered that I could swim. The more and more I did it the more I developed the appreciation for it. Swimming is one of those things where I had love and hate relationship with. I didn't ever truly appreciate the support until I went to see a sports psychologist who helped me really find the deeper meaning in it. Seeing her made me truly realize that I actually like to swim in that I wasn't just doing it for somebody else. Because when I was swimming, I always felt like I was nothing without my mother's approval. Swimming felt like a 9 to 5 job rather than a sport that I did to keep myself in shape. With help from the psychologist, I really truly begin to feel joy in what I did rather than the motions and emotionless. I discovered my joy in swimming when I stopped or relying so

heavily on [best] times and others approval rather the approval of myself and knowing that if I give it 110 no matter what I go I know I tried my hardest and I no idea what I had to do and that's where I found the happiness.

Swimmer 14

For me, swimming in competitions have not always brought me joy, it took me awhile to stop worrying about dropping time or what my time is. It still is a work in progress but now I don't [let] it effect my outlook on the meet. I feel as if college swimming has opened up a whole new wave of happiness/ joy. I finally feel like I'm not a hamster constantly spinning on a wheel. I feel good here, working hard and having a whole supportive team it's exciting, it makes me happy. Everyday something new happens and it makes me excited to come to practice/competition, I look forward to it and seeing/conversing with all my teammates. I'm excited to continue to build connections and create that joy in and out of the water with my teammates and coaches.

Swimmer 15

Struggle is definitely a feeling that I've felt when learning how to swim. Struggling how to adapt to the water, keeping up with your teammates' speed, and other factors that many athletes encounter throughout their athletic career.

When it comes to joy and swim practice, the joy in this scenario is definitely the "dance" that I go through with my teammates. With my current roommates at the moment, we definitely been through so much outside and in the pool. There are many situations that we encounter, but not being alone and having someone to go through it with you is considered joy to me. Joy to me means finding the smallest piece of happiness in everything I do. I know so far in this semester, it's been a bumpy ride. However, *teammate* has been there with me through my rough times in the pool and outside of the pool and having her go through these bumps in the road shows her support and that's my joy.

During the meet last weekend, I know some of the swimmers were a bit discouraged with their races. The way that I see racing is just to have fun or just to focus on the little goals so it can lead me to achieve my major goals. I know it's hard for people to have the same mindset when it comes to swimming because all they want to do is to swim best times. Swimming lifetime best times is great, but the little things that lead to the best times are crucial to

swimming. Practicing and nailing a technique or race strategy brings me joy because it makes me feel more confident in myself, the training, and the coach.

Swimmer 16

No Response

Swimmer 17

It has been difficult to find joy in swimming throughout these many years. Swimming is a difficult sport both mentally and physically. Some days are better than others. Finding the joy and happiness varies from practice to practice. I think that friends, family, coaches, and the feeling of accomplishment is where I find the most joy and happiness in swimming. Beyond all of that, I really found a joy in swimming these past two weekends. Especially with not having true swimming for the past eight months, it was hard to find the want to continue swimming, and the joy in it. Competing in college has really changed that for me. I found a lot of happiness these past couple of weekends with my new team. Swim has gotten back to being joyful and I have really started to find a want to go to swim and to find happiness in it. You have also been a big part of that, so thank you and thank you for giving me a chance to find joy and happiness again!

Swimmer 18

It was weird being in the water the past two weeks, it's probably the most "normal" the cadence of swimming has felt since March. Each of the meets were really fun and I liked getting to know my team more. I've had a hard time feeling like I don't really have a place on our team, and I know I do but it's hard to remember that sometimes. I want to be able to race like actually race, like I could before covid and not just be that girl who gets an asthma attack. I know this journal is supposed to be about joy, but I am pretty low on that right now, I am frustrated because my breathing is so much worse than it was before covid, I had thought I had actually figured some things out but right now it feels pretty overbearing. I am thankful to be here and thankful to swim, but I am really not sure what I am happy about right now. I am looking forward to the next couple of weeks hoping I can get some more perspective and hoping my swimming won't continue to revolve around my breathing.

Swimmer 19

Swimming takes a lot of commitment in order to achieve your goals. There were so many times growing up when I had to say no to things like hanging out with friends or going on

vacations because I made the decision to go to swim practice instead. In a way swimming has sort of controlled my life but in a good way because I chose to make the decision of swimming over other things because of the joy I got from swimming. Swimming lets me feel “free” in a way that I can just let go of stress and things happening outside of swim and just be who I am. I know I will always have some bad experiences through this sport, but majority of them being great memories that I will never forget. The past three journals we have done have made me realize how much coaches, teammates, and competition have contributed to those memories and my love for swimming. The past two weeks, being able to compete again after not being able to for so long, made me so happy again because I felt like we were able to bond so much and made it feel like we are an actual team. I think I have learned a lot about myself in the past year and it has helped me grow as a swimmer and outside of the pool.

Swimmer 20

Just like anything else, what goes up must come down. There would not be a way to grasp the idea of true joy or happiness without seeing the other side of it first. There would be no comparison. This journal entry is hard for me to write because I, along with a lot of other people, am still trying to find that true happiness and joy. College is already a hard time in one's life but now to figure out who you are as a person, who you want to be, what actually brings you joy within, and not just temporarily. Trying to find what lights a fire within you, rather than puts a smile on your face for a few seconds. Swimming is one way to ground ourselves. We have been doing this sport for years and it is now a safe space for us. Not the racing, not the uncertainty, but the fact of feeling comfortable in the water, in the sport, with our team. It is something that we have spent countless of hours doing. Being able to race, although hard with everything going on in the world, it was nice to be back in that rhythm. To have that safety blanket as if it showed us that everything will be okay. I think that joy and happiness does come from small interactions or memories, but it is made up of the things that we love most.

Swimmer 21

I have mentioned in one of my earliest journals that during high school I dealt with some mental health issues and swimming was something that was somewhat of an escape. It was a space that I felt good about myself and that I felt control or in your posted definition, free.

Those 4 years of high school my love for swimming developed so strongly, but in less than a year that love was completely depleted after my freshman season. Something you said a teammate mentioned in the beginning of the week posing the question of if we could go back to March pre pandemic, would we? That is an easy no for me. When I was at *former college*, I was so distraught at what felt like my relationship with swimming falling apart. I had associated so much of who I was with swimming that when I started to feel adversely towards it, I felt somewhat of a shell of what I had perceived to be my former self. I rarely cry, but there were more than one times towards the end of season that I would get out of practice and find myself breaking down in the locker room. I was so heartbroken that the thing I had loved for so many years and that brought me so much happiness and grounding was then giving me so much dread and emotional exhaustion. Without being sent home in March I don't know if my swimming career would have survived. Before conference I was planning on quitting after the fact but going to that meet made me realize I still had love for the sport just not there and I needed to find another place I could do that. I learned a lot from *former college* and not even a whole year really changed me for the best I think. Going through that rough patch with the sport made me become my own person outside of that and I really came to like myself without identifying as just a swimmer. And something that I like about myself is I'm not a quitter, so although it was a bit of a risk with never having been here or meeting you or anyone on the team, the joy started again with deciding to try again and come here. I know you said it before in a comment, but I really agree that I needed that year at *former college*. I gained a lot of perspective and balance from that experience and being here now this is probably the most joyful I have ever felt doing the sport. I'm finally my own person and balanced enough to fall in love with swim again and I couldn't be more glad that those hard times happened to get here. I have a lot of respect for swimming, but like any relationship, I don't think it should be "saving" anyone. A theme that I've found to be really important for me throughout these journals is balance. With balance I've found working hard and being a part of a team really enjoyable and rewarding and even in the hard sets I really think to myself how there's no place I'd rather be. And getting to race with this newfound love and a fresh start was so fun. And it was so cool to not have it be a "certain way" to be enjoyable. For example, we didn't have to win to make it fun or go a best time to be proud. It was really awesome to feel rewarded just from trying hard and being competitive

with new friends and I couldn't be more grateful so thank you again for giving me this opportunity.

Swimmer 22

No Response

Swimmer 23

No Response

Swimmer 24

I have definitely had my fair share of happiness and heartache with the sport of swimming in the past few years my journey has been in the valley part but I am slowing working my way back to the top of the wave. Earlier in the year, Mark and I had a meeting about my mental state because I had two mental breakdowns in two weeks, and honestly, I look back at it now and then and as I ponder what was happening I came up with a hypothesis. I think I started to fall deeply in love with the sport again, but I had gone so long putting my value as a person in my times that my brain freaked out about enjoying what I do again because that opened up the possibility of being hurt all over again which is absolutely terrifying. Anyways, during this meeting coach Mark also pointed out that it seems to be that when I am on a high it is really high and when I am low, I get really low; which I do not disagree I just never really thought about it but these past few weeks I have and I think it is because my love for swimming is so strong and I as a person just feel deeply with everything I have. Which I think adds to the joy parts of swimming, because feeling joy is already an ecstasy type of feeling so for me it is multiplied and feels indescribably incredibly amazing. However, this also is the same for the heartache part that comes with the sport. Fortunately, the feeling with joy is a lot stronger and gets me through the hard times.

Swimmer 25

Without the struggles that I have had to overcome, I do not think I would be able to distinguish the highs and the lows. Let's expand on that; back in my previous club, I obviously was miserable, but at the time that I was swimming then, I did not know I was miserable. I just thought that every swimmer went through the verbal and mental abuse that I had gone through, since that is what all my other teammates went through with me, and none of them really complained. It was kind of "yeah life sucks but we really don't know any other way of life". That was the vibe there. Yeah, we get screamed at multiple times a day, we train

too much, we are constantly mentally and physically fatigued, we are all unconsciously depressed, but that was our everyday lives. We endured all of this. As I explained in a previous journal, I don't think I had experienced true happiness in the water until I went to Canada Games. I remember vividly thinking to myself the first training week we had, "Coaches can be nice? Teammates are supportive? Everyone is happy? Is this really what swimming is supposed to be?" Then, when Canada Games ended, and I went back to my regular horrible swimming routine, I soon realized that I was really unhappy. I wanted every practice I went to to be as fun as Canada Games was. I had so much trouble motivating myself that season to go to practice; I honestly hated everything at that point, and just missed all my friends from Canada Games. I was never the best at school; I never really enjoyed it either. I am just downright bad at math, sciences were fine, I loved social studies and history, English I was always good at. In my grade 10 year, coming off of Canada Games, I soon started taking out my stress and frustration onto my schoolwork. I just always found myself studying as my escape from swimming. I think it was because, in grade 10, we finally were able to choose to take more electives, and I choose psychology which I really enjoyed. I was finally taking classes that I liked, and my teachers were pretty great too. I soon found myself researching how to study and prep for the SAT, realizing that I really wanted to swim in the states for my university years. I was not wanting to stay in Canada, but that a whole other story as to why. I was starting to love school, I had a good group of friends who loved and supported me, but it was almost like I was living a double life. In one life I was truly happy, and in the other, I did not want to exist any longer. I think my mom realized that I was just suffering, and she was the one who talked me into switching clubs. Now that I switched clubs, at first it still felt weird. It was as if I was on a training camp trip, and one day I would move back to my old club and my old life and be miserable. But eventually, I came around and I found the fun of swimming again. I can't wait to be on a varsity team. It has been my dream since I was 10. I know that varsity swimming will be so fun, and I am so excited that I get to do it with UI. I think that the highs and lows of swimming do not solely exist in the water. I think that there are many other factors that contribute to the path to joyous swimming. The environment, the people you train with, the coaches, your mental state are just some examples that contribute to a happy swim attitude. Without going through the mental toughness I went through, and without the life-saving Canada Games experience, I do

not think I would have found my joyous swimming path. I think I would have just been sad, and I genuinely think my old coach would have talked me out of swimming in the states. I am really glad that I have gone through all of these experiences in swimming, all the good and the bad because, without any of this, I would not have become the person that I am today.

Week Twelve (Final Week): Truth and Essence

Reflection Prompt:

We have spent the past three months reflecting on your personal journey through the sport of swimming. Through our weekly discussions we discovered that your journey and dance has many partners. You have a relationship with the water, a coach, teammates, competitors, and the sport itself. As we head into the midway point of your season this week, we spent a little time every day to acknowledge that your “lived experience” in swimming has truth, meaning, and essence. Describe the meaning of YOUR experience in the water both the beautiful and sublime.

Swimmer 1

Throughout my eleven years of swimming, I have found several truths to why I swim. It first started with my love for being water and the comfort I felt being in it. Then, I started to love swimming because of the people I met and how it began to give me a purpose in my life. Swimming began to give me a purpose when I decided that my dream was to swim in college, preferably division 1. This goal, I wanted so bad that it motivated me so much even when I wanted to quit because of its high demands. However, that would not happen because it is most always the highlight of my day. Swimming has been an escape for me from stress in school and home life where I can have fun while working hard at the same time. However, before this study I never realized why I swim and what keeps me swimming, so I never really realized the value of swimming in my life.

Swimmer 2

This whole journaling process has really helped me understand my relationship with the sport as well as how I cope with different areas of life. Even though I have been writing about swimming and my history with swimming, that doesn't mean that it doesn't relate to different parts of my life. Swimming has made me into the person I am today and has helped develop different traits and routines within my life. To me, each part of life has a meaning and I think

everything happens for a reason. Each decision I make helps develop me as a person, even the smallest decisions like choosing to do a set on my own than swimming with the group. Even though this is a small decision, it helps shape who I am which is someone who wants to better themselves physically and mentally. Swimming a set by yourself isn't normally ideal and is not always fun, it would have been easy for me to say no and just do the normal set with all my teammates, but I know that if I didn't do the distance set I would be upset with myself the rest of the day. Swimming has pushed me to my limits and has helped me develop a strong work ethic as well as good time management. Sport in general, in my opinion, is a way for individuals to manage all the different elements of life. School can be compared to your job and sport could be compared to hanging out with your friends or an extra activity outside a work environment that makes you happy.

This whole year has helped me realize a lot of things about myself and a lot of things that I take for granted. With COVID being one of the main conflicts in society today I really took for granted the small things in life like going out to dinner, taking a day to go shopping, or driving to take a day trip with my family or friends. Not going home for Thanksgiving gave me a lot of time to think by myself, it was my first time away from my family for Thanksgiving and I basically talked to my family all throughout the day. I knew that yesterday was going to be extremely hard for me and it took me all of my strength to get out of bed and actually be around people. I did have Thanksgiving with some of the teammates, but it wasn't the same even though I knew it wasn't going to be. I have a really small family so we are really close-knit and with the time by myself, I really appreciated my family dynamic even more; we will always be close no matter what and I know that I won't miss another Thanksgiving with my family if COVID is not a thing.

Back to swimming, each swimmer has a different meaning of what it means to them. For me, I can't really put it into words because it means multiple things to me. Obviously, it is a way I get exercise and a way for me to be competitive; but it means much more than that. It has given me drive, time management, determination, confidence, and a good work ethic. All of these qualities are things that will benefit me all through my life. But most importantly it gave me another support system that is outside of my own family. All of my teammates are going to be a huge part of my life and we will honestly be in touch till the day I die. I have a couple of high school friends that I am really close with, but I will be close with everyone on

this team. Coming in I did not think I would develop these friendships so quickly and on a deeper level in just 2 years. Along with my teammates, Mark you as a coach has been another one of my supporters that has really helped me become the person I am. College can be one of the most stressful times in our lives and having your support can really help all of us get through all the schoolwork, exams, and projects we need to do. When I walk out on deck everything fades away and I am in the moment at the pool, and I can deal with all the school stuff when I leave and get back to my apartment. I wanted to let you know on this last journal that I am extremely grateful to say that you are my coach. And most importantly I am extremely grateful for all of your support you have given me over the past 2 years and everything you have done for me.

Swimmer 3

My relationship with the water is nothing short of a roller coaster. It gives me days ranging from horrible to days where I'm ecstatic because of my practice. When I got here, I also had to relearn how to swim. my strokes and muscle memory didn't change but I was changed. Coming off years of competing for my spot in lane 3 to realizing I had to give it up again to the up-and-coming boy swimmer I just felt like I was going backwards. I have always had a rough mid-season. I don't swim great unrested because my legs are tired, but I swim better tired than I do partially rested. So, meets could be a hit and miss. lots of tears which I was always told were a non-needed thing. And the constant fights with my mom, always the same story because if I didn't care then I she would get upset about that and if I cared too much she would get upset about that. But that change when I started practicing with the girls here. I no longer had to prove myself every day. I could swim for me. Retraining my lungs for my underwater is probably one of the hardest mentally to do but I had fun seeing how far I could make it off each wall. The feeling of racing again in practice is one I have missed forever. To be able to finish the very first Monday 100s set has to be one of my favorite sets yet. To be supported through laughter and tears and to actually feel comfortable enough to try new things. Like being uncomfortable going out faster than I'd like in my races. something drastically had to change for me to get my love for the water back and that is what happened. My truth for how well I perform comes from my relationships with my team and coaches. This is probably one of the first teams I have ever been on where I do [not] feel out casted. I was accepted into the team by some older girls, and it lit up my years. My relationship with

you is huge to me. I like that I feel comfortable talking to you about anything and that I can come crying to you and you understand what's going on. And my relationship with Katy, she has made so many things possible for me to try in these past couple of weeks because without her I would still be lost. Without either of you I would be lost. These last two meets have been hard, but they have been the start of something new. I have to continue to understand that change takes time and I have to learn how to work with specific tools that will help my racing and swimming in general. The water is my friend and I have relearned how to love swimming again. I no longer dread practice, but I also don't want to use last year as an excuse anymore. I have to swim how I know I can swim and that is how I want to remember the sport. I have to work on my mental side more than my physical side and pray that things will come together. Sometimes lack of control is better for me than over controlling the situation. Letting go helped me regain my sense and thank you for taking me in because without this team I would be a complete disaster

Swimmer 4

No Response

Swimmer 5

Swimming has always been so up and down for me. Of course I've always loved it but its the hardest thing I've ever done. I love working hard and feeling accomplished after a hard practice, but sometimes I love just being there whether I'm having a bad day or not. Swimming allows me to think through my problems, my homework, and what's up next for me this month, day, etc. I've had times where the training just does not transfer over to racing. I have had times where I beat myself up so bad mentally because all the work I put in just didn't seem to pay off. It's always so nice to swim though. Somehow I just keep going every time, and try my best, whether it works out or not. I have had so many challenges, just like anyone does in the span of their lives. My closest friends have always been swim friends and I find myself spending so much time with them in and out of the water. I always wondered why this was. This reflection made me realize that its because no one else can understand what I go through besides them. They bring me so much happiness and help me to thrive in the water. I could never imagine swimming alone and my teammates help to make swimming what it is. I think that I get down on myself a little bit too often but all of my issues are mostly mental. It's always so easy for me to see how amazing everyone else is and

for me to see all their potential and how hard they work. Where as for myself, I find it hard to know if I'm on the right track or if I'm even that good. I think that I always have a pretty positive mindset I just get frustrated or worried when strokes don't feel prepared or how I think they should feel. I always want to push myself to be my best and I find swimming extremely therapeutic. I find it hard to sometimes find a balance between races or a swimming to not define me as a person as I don't want to let anyone down with my swims. Overall, of course I swim for my own joy and wanting of growth but sometimes its hard to not let outside forces or the forces of my mind cloud my own visions of success and overall performances.

Swimmer 6

I've been swimming ever since I can remember. I truly love this sport and the people in it. I'm really glad I got to participate in your research because writing these journals have helped me as well. It made me think of the relationship I have with the water, and I got to reminisce about the good old days. It's crazy to think that I only have a few more years of my swimming career left. The times have gone by fast, and college is going by fast too. I'll admit that there have been times that I wanted to quit the sport and do something else with my life. But it's the people that make me want to improve myself and continue to do what I'm good at. Swimming has given me a lot of experience and memories that I wouldn't have gotten any other way. I'm very thankful of the opportunities this sport has given me because I know that others don't get the opportunities that I do.

Thanks for letting us contribute to your study!!

Swimmer 7

I have always been told that I'm a thinker. Coaches have told me I overthink things in the pool, whether it be time-related or technique-related. Teachers have told me to not second-guess myself on exams and to go with my gut instinct because they know I know the material. My friends and family have said I'm too worried about what other people think sometimes and I need to do what is best for myself. While all of these statements and observations have some truth, I would not change a thing about my personality. I'm proud of who I am. To me, truly thinking about or analyzing things shows care, consideration, and reflection. It means I am not doing things mindlessly or without a purpose; it means I genuinely want to improve the outcome of a situation and maximize the benefit myself and

others receive from that outcome. These journals have been the perfect opportunity for me to do my thinking and put my thoughts into words. I have really enjoyed expressing myself through these prompts and exploring the world of swimming and what it means to me, personally. I've been swimming year-round for almost twelve years now...that's a lot of time to absorb, learn, and create things both in and out of the water. So many life lessons and memories have come from this sport and though they are always with me, sometimes I think I forget about them, so these journals have been a great way for them to resurface. I have been able to relive my swimming career, from the time I was five, swimming on a rec team in sunny California and my mom would draw little slogans or pictures on my back in Sharpie for spirit at meets, all the way to present-day, almost twenty years old, swimming indoors in a small town in Idaho, fulfilling my dream of swimming collegiately, despite the many challenges and setbacks I have faced along the way. When people ask me why I swim, I could give them a laundry list of reasons: the many life skills I have taken away from the sport (time management, commitment, dedication, persistence, mental strength, the importance of teamwork, etc.), the benefits to my physical health, the countless lifelong relationships I have formed with coaches and teammates. But most of all, I have found myself in this sport. I don't want to say that swimming defines me, because it doesn't; it's a massive part of my life and has shaped me into the person I am today, but there are certainly things about me that didn't result from swimming. I know one day, this chapter of my life will end, and I will find something else to occupy my time, and that's okay because I am a well-rounded individual and all good things must come to an end. But although this sport doesn't define me, it has given me a voice. I am somewhat of a shy person at first, but swimming has given me the tools and the confidence to be myself. I never found I fit in very well with friends at my fancy high school or was interested in the same things they were, but swimming has provided me with like-minded individuals who not only share my hopes and dreams, but support my own, as well. Swimming has also strengthened my family bond. While my family was close prior to my swimming career, and I know we still would be even if I hadn't advanced this far, we have truly bonded over our shared love of sport. For my dad, it was football, and when my brother was born, it eventually became baseball. Swimming allowed him to explore a new sport as well, and we shared our love for competition and hard work on these topics. My brother saw how much I loved my sport, and

he was inspired to find that same connection with a sport of his own, which he found in baseball. In fact, he would have never even considered going to *college* to play if he hadn't come to help me move into my dorm at the University of Idaho. For my mom especially, it was a connection we shared. She had swam in high school so she was familiar with the sport, but when she drove me to practices or meets, listened to me rant after hard practices, or hugged me after races all those years, it made our relationship stronger than ever. She was always there, and still is, because swimming was a powerful link between us. I love my family so much, and they are the most important thing in my life. Knowing swimming not only didn't ruin our bond but instead strengthened it is all the validation I needed to confirm I have made the right decision sticking with it for so many years. I am so grateful for swimming and the opportunity to express that emotion in these journals. I will never forget the impact these have had on my life, even when my swimming career finally comes to an end. I know I will always look back and remember the lessons and experiences I have had during this time of my life, and I cannot wait to share those thoughts with others.

Swimmer 8

Like we've talked about before the last year has been more of a struggle than most, to say the least, but even though there have been the lows there have also been highs. I also think that given the repeated struggles I have had this year it has really put into perspective why I keep swimming and why it makes me happy. We need to have struggles in order to be rejuvenated and understand why we don't just quit and walk away from the sport altogether. As the cheesy [sic] saying goes, you don't know what you have until you lose it. Now if you talk about the FUN aspect of the sport, it doesn't always have to do with swimming itself or competing specifically. To be honest prior to this year if you had asked me what the fun parts of swimming are I probably wouldn't have told you competition specifically, instead, I would have told you about the things I experienced on travel trips outside of the pool area and other activities that I took part in with my teammates. However, after this year I have been reminded of how much fun it can be to compete and I would have never realized this if it weren't for those lows.

Swimmer 9

For years in my classes, I have been asked what is your truth, what is your meaning. It has only been recently that I have really taken the time and thought about what is my truth? What

is my meaning? And this is both in life and in swimming, but swimming is basically my life, so life and swimming are almost the same thing. And honestly, it's such a weird question to ask, because how the hell am I supposed to know! My English teachers would tell me, find your truth and write about it, find your meaning and turn it into an essay. But my truth and my meaning is always changing. I am an evolving human being and I change every second, minute, hour, day, month and year. That's the beauty of life and being human and being me. I am always changing and learning, and as I have mentioned in previous journals, that is something that has taken me a really long time to learn and continue to learn. I have a need for control, I crave it, I crave stability, I crave perfection. But I have learned that it is ok to let go and just let whatever happens, happen. And I am ok with that, sometimes when I let go and stop trying to control every little aspect of life, I am able to succeed and better myself. For example, let's look at Monday of this previous week. I reached a breaking point, one of many, but I really just reached my breaking point, I felt like I was being suffocated, I couldn't control my feelings or my breathing my whole body was tense and shaking. And I probably cried for like 6 hours and slept most of the day, but honestly that was probably the best thing for me. I got everything out and I calmed myself down, and when Tuesday came around, I was ready to go and swimming decently well on Tuesday and for the rest of the week. But what did I remember during this day. Although I couldn't focus and the water honestly just did not feel welcoming or like my friend, it was still there, the water was still there the next day. The pool is always there, it's just my mentality that creates these scenarios in my head and work myself up which pulls me away from the pool. So right now, in this moment, my truth my meaning is to swim. To be in the water. To race and compete. To find comfort and joy in the water. I am here to better myself as a swimmer and as a person. And right now, I am really happy with who I am as a person, I really am. I will never forget the times of self-loathing because those moments made me stronger and taught me to love myself, and I am still learning. There will always be times of self-loathing, or self-doubt and that's human, but I can confidently say that who I am in this point in time, I really love, and I am really proud of. I have always wanted to be a people pleaser and do whatever I can to make sure that others are happy and ok, I always put others before myself, and it got bad, I spent all my time and energy in small little dramatic things that didn't really matter. But I forgot that I am a person too, that I matter too, my happiness matters too. And now, I am ok

not being part of the clique [sic] or the popular group. I am ok being on my own and growing and improving myself. And I obviously still care for others, and always will care, but I also remember that it is ok to put myself first sometimes, and make sure I am ok so that I can help others. I am kind of jumping all around in this journal, but I keep coming back to this thought of love and joy. I forgot what it felt like to love swimming. And that makes me so emotional, because there was a time where I didn't love swimming, I questioned my abilities and my meaning, like why am I here, I can't contribute anything to this team. I hated myself, I hated the water (even though the water saved me many times), I just wasn't happy. But here I am, on the Vandals swim and dive team, the happiest I've been in a long time, and I feel like I can contribute something to this team, whether it's, smiles, laughter or points. So, my meaning and truth is to be here and on this team and I believe it, and I love it.

Swimmer 10

I have really enjoyed this journey. It was so nice to be able to talk about myself, if that makes sense. I don't mean for that to sound selfish, but it was just a breath of fresh air to be able to think about, and for, myself for at least a few minutes once a week. I think I sometimes lose sight of who I am because I try so hard to please everyone else, but I think writing these journals has helped me discover a lot more about myself. My mom left today and before she left, she said, "You don't have to be so hard on yourself, dad and I will love you no matter what." I already knew that, but it was nice to hear, especially with everything going on in my life right now. I've started to learn that sometimes I just get tired of trying to be all these different things for people, but at the same time noticed how thankful I was for those people that make me want to be those things. I still have a lot to learn about myself and I also know that it's okay to just not understand or know why I feel a certain way, but I'm living a pretty special life with very special people, and I wouldn't change it for anything. Thank you for guiding me to be the best version of *athlete's name* that there is, and I can't wait to spend two (ish) more years swimming for the best coach in the world (as your socks say) and next to the best teammates/friends a girl could have.

Swimmer 11

Throughout the past 12 weeks we have reflected on our different experiences throughout this sport. These journals have been an excellent way to put personal thoughts and feelings into words, as well as have a direct line to you as our coach. I think that these journals have really

allowed for you to better understand and know the journey I have taken to be where I am today. Swimming has allowed me to understand who I am and has helped me grow into what I am today. Many of the different things I have experienced because of swimming, such as living with other families and being exposed to abuse of power, has taught me so many different life lessons. These journals have helped me turn some negative experiences into positive lessons and I understand that each and every thing that takes place in my life helps me be who I am. I have always had such a strong relationship with water. I have always been in the water and swimming and cannot remember a time where I didn't know how to swim. This sport is so much more than just a sport. It is more than just a way to stay fit and exercise. It has given me a family. A long my journey from team to team I have made friends that will be in my life forever. My first team was in my hometown that was very small and still to this day, a group of us try and get together at least once a year. We have known each other for years and we will all always be very special to one another. On my last team, I was living away from and so many people took me and took care of me. I have my "fake family", the people in which I lived with my last year, and they are truly my second family. The impact they had on me is something you do not discover in just sport. Swimming brought me close to so many teammates but living away from my family also made me close to their parents. They all always took care of me and ensure I had rides places. I can turn to any of these families still and I know I have their support always. I have so many memories that will last a lifetime even the hard ones. I think it is so important to understand that I am who I am because of the hard times and because of this sport.

Swimmer 12

No Response

Swimmer 13

The meaning of my experience in the water is much more than just swimming itself. As I said in the very beginning swimming has been a connection to so many different relationships and memories. There is no way I think I would have ever even known some of these without it. Me and my mom for example. Swimming has brought us closer due to the fact that it made her realize she needed to take a step back and let her daughter grow up. And it made me realize that I have to fight and want things for myself, rather the others around me. The memories are sacred. I never would have known the feeling of getting a best time, or

even committing to a future. I never would have learned how to manage a crazy life or relationships. Swimming has brought me to places and people whom I'm grateful for and that's why for me it's so much more than just water. It's a bond.

Swimmer 14

My experience with the water in general is pretty joyful. I love to swim whether that means play swimming or sport swimming. I love the way the water clears my head and I feel at comfort. Though there are often times I find myself uncomfortable in the water, meaning during a hard practice or a race but a phrase that has always stuck with me is "get comfortable with being uncomfortable". Being in the water for a lot of people is scary, they feel like the water has more power over themselves. One thing that swimming competitively has taught me is that when in the water you have the power. You have control over what you do and that brings me joy/comfort knowing that I am in control of myself in the water and what I do. I love how this sport and how it has had a major impact on shaping me into the individual I am today.

Swimmer 15

Throughout my journey as a swimmer, there has definitely been some nasty times that I've gone through. However, my swim journey has helped me become the person I am. All of the tough sets that I swim with my other teammates, the relationships that I've had with coaches has made an impact on me throughout my 10 years of swimming. Before Mark introduced the research that we helped him with, I didn't realize how the water has its qualities of helping me cope with my problems and I shouldn't take practices for granted. As a student-athlete swimmer, it's difficult to wake up early in the morning and dive into the cold water. But, if I didn't do that, I wouldn't have made so many memories from swimming.

Swimmer 16

Writing weekly journals has helped me to think a lot about how swimming has impacted me and how much value this sport brings to my life. Swimming has been a constant for me throughout all the good and bad times that I have had and has helped me through a lot. The lessons that I have learned from this sport have helped shape me into who I am and has enabled me to be successful in other ways outside of swimming. My experience with swimming has been different from others, but also the same in a lot of ways. I appreciate that there are so many different ways that people can experience swimming because it allows for

so many different types of people to be involved in it. I have met so many amazing people through swimming and I think that shows how amazing swimming is. Despite the difficulties that swimming may bring, the positives far outweigh the negatives. I am grateful to continuously have opportunities to learn more about myself and the world through swimming.

Swimmer 17

No Response

Swimmer 18

I grew up thinking I swam because it's hard. I think that's why I started swimming, because it challenged me to be better, reminded me I was strong, gave me superpowers. Now that I am older, I think that's a big reason I swim but I know there is more. This past year has been hard, coming to school has been hard and swimming has been hard. Some days are better than others but I'm sure if I could tell you why. Sometimes it feels like everything is happening to me without much influence from me at all. But that isn't my relationship with swimming.

Swimming is where I used to be able to go and be completely in control. These days I am not as in control as I used to be. This past year, as one of the ways my home coach tried to help me cope with the breathing stuff, we started doing these "challenges" where you would let all your air out and crawl at the bottom of the pool as far as you could. And I loved it. It wasn't a set it wasn't really a game either. It was just, like you say, being. Being there underwater with nothing. That sort of thing is what I think I chase, the quiet, the peaceful. I have a very type-A personality, it's part of what made me so prone to the VCD. I am in control, I'm high strung, I'm the planner. My head is never not full. Swimming is the only thing I've found that will allow me to be completely present.

I wonder if I will talk about swimming when I reminisce on my childhood or my college experience in the future. I know that swimming isn't who I am, but my life often seems to revolve around my time in the pool. I was one of the only people who swam in my small town so that was my "thing". However, I feel like I have so many more "things" that I never do anymore. I can paint and have gotten a couple of awards for it actually, I'm crafty and know my way around my dad's shop, I hunt, I care a lot about politics, and I love adventures. I wonder who I will be when I am done swimming. And I often think about when I will be

done. I know I haven't talked with you about it at all, but I am trying to graduate in 3 years just for money reasons as I am wanting to go to grad school. So, it seems odd to me that this thing that I have done my entire life could be over in just under 3 years now. My family was a swim family, my brother swam, my mom was the president of the board, and my dad is still a certified meet ref. A lot of our weekends were spent at the small pool in my hometown. And that is what I have done for so long now and sometimes I feel like I've lost my why.

Swimmer 19

I have never really thought this deep into the meaning behind why I swim or what keeps me coming back to the pool every day. The past three months of reflections have been so helpful in allowing me to discover those reasons and bring back all the fun memories, people, and skills swimming has brought into my life. I have learned so much about myself which has helped bring back the joy I have for the sport as it did when I first started swimming. Just the few meets that we have been able to have so far this season, I think it shows how I have learned to not stress about the things that are out of my control and just have fun with it and I think the reflections have helped me get to this point. I feel more relaxed behind the blocks and more excited to race than I have ever felt before and I am swimming so much smoother and faster than I was at this point last year. I used to put too much pressure on myself, and I would get so disappointed with myself when I felt like my hard work at practice didn't pay off at meets, but this year I feel like it's finally starting to. Swimming has taught me so many valuable life skills like my work ethic, time management, and commitment which I am so thankful for. I continue to swim every day because of the happiness it brings me, even at early morning practices. My teammates and coaches make coming to practice feel like play rather than work. I think everyone has a different journey and relationship with their sport but there is something bigger than the sport itself that always seems to bring us together as a team. Thank you for letting me be part of this study, I think it has helped me with the mental aspect of my swimming more than I expected it to.

Swimmer 20

Throughout the past 12 weeks it has been an interesting process. It has been cool to force yourself to think about your relationship with the sport and all aspects of it, while most of the time we do not go that deep into it. It made me realize how big of an impact every part of the

sport makes on us even if we may not appreciate it that much. I have realized that swimming is a bigger part of me than just my sport and what I do every day. But it has helped shaped me as a person, allows me to go out of my comfort zone, has helped me mature. We can all thank this sport for being more than just some competition, but rather something that has helped make us who we are.

Swimmer 21

I am not very big into astrology, but I have this app that if you put in your birth time and place and such it provides a chart for you and little sayings each day. A bunch of my friends from home have it and we talk about it often as a joke because it tends to say some funny and not really accurate things. However, the chart it provides telling you your planet placements and what it means, not that I really understand the science behind it, is shockingly accurate in some ways and is kinda fun to read. My roommate from last year and I were reading our whole charts to each other a few days ago just for fun and one of the things mine said was that I find success in transformation which to that we laughed out loud because that is so true. As I believe I've mentioned once before I really love learning in a sense of life and self stuff. Like something about life lessons and growing from things that have happened really make me feel good and proud of myself. In regards to the transformation thing, I love the feeling of being in change and continually becoming better. I think that's where most of my meaning comes from in swimming because the relationship, goals, my own athleticism is ever changing and giving new opportunities to learn and become even more myself. I am thinking character growth is the coolest concept. To think of who I believed myself to be senior year, to last year, to now I would say is a very different person. I like myself a lot better now honestly. And a lot of these instances of coming of age has come from swimming. Of course, I know now because of my experience at *former college* that I am much more than swimming, but that constant in my life has led me on a course that I most definitely would not have [the] experience of if it weren't for that sport. I think it's built a lot of maturity and discipline into me as well as how to make things fun for myself and others. And these reflections especially I think I have contributed even more processing of what makes things meaningful to be and how I want to be impacted by different things. Part of the reason I chose to come to Idaho and continuing swimming was because of something my mom said to me when we were sent home. She pointed out that I only had a few more years to do this at

all and there really is nothing like doing a college sport. And she's completely right. And I couldn't possibly want to coach if I didn't believe that. The amount of learning and therefore meaning that I have given to myself within the past year is something I wouldn't trade for anything, and I want to continue that beyond my time in the pool but with others. I envision the reward of people really coming into themselves along with my help and insight being really cool. Especially hearing you talk about the letters from alumni, I can only hope to have such a positive impact on the people I coach. And in a final thought, what I find really interesting is that things only have as much meaning as you give them which is a really cool thing to be able to control and I think shows a lot about a person with how they handle that, so I may be forever transforming, but as long as I find meaning in the lessons I'll always have something to be proud of and hopefully something to share with other people.

Swimmer 22

Swimming has changed my life in so many ways, physically and mentally. It's a way to take my mind off things and to just let go sometimes. It brings me joy in the water and out of the water when cheering on my teammates. The part of swimming that brings me happiness is the friendships I create when we all experience the same things. Knowing that there are others that are like me going through the same situations, comforts me and I find happiness in that. This past weekend against *opposing team* was the most fun meet I have experienced in such a long time. For the first time ever in a long time, I was able to not feel stressed or pressured. Being that there is covid and during practice we are split from the freshman or others on the other side of the pool, being at a swim meet with everyone changes things. I was able to socialize with everyone that I may have hardly talked to and have some amazing interactions with them. I also felt like everyone was having so much fun as well. I feel like sometimes we can get soooo into the moment of the meet that we don't take the time to have fun while being competitive. This past weekend I really noticed mostly everyone having a good time and realizing that not everything has been so serious... I am glad that I can find ways to be happy and joyful during a time like this! :)

Swimmer 23

No Response

Swimmer 24

Whenever I get the chance to "compete" or race whether it be in practice or at a meet it brings me joy because it gives me a rush of adrenaline that is unexplainable, but I will try my best. When I am able to get past my nerves and truly race not thinking about the outcome I get a rush of excitement but also calm at the same time, I can feel the water and it flowing through my hands and past my body but also at the same time am not paying attention to it, I am focused but zoned out at the same time. I don't know it's a weird experience that is hard to explain but feels amazing. Yes, there were a few times where I experienced this, and I haven't felt like that in a long time. I am really enjoying swimming again and getting back to the point of how I was when I was younger. This weekend has made me excited to swim again and meant the world to me, not only did both Mark and Katie help a ton with starting to get over my performance anxiety but the team is so supportive, and I loved being weird and getting them to laugh, it made me laugh. I was ready to give up competition and to either just swim for myself or to give it up all together at the start of quarantine. However, I gave Mark and this team a chance, and I am glad I did. I am incredibly grateful to be a part of the team and swim, everyone including the coaches has aided in my journey to loving swimming again and I do not know where I would be if I wasn't here with them being a part of something bigger than me.

Swimmer 25

No Response

Appendix G: Sport Anxiety Scale-2

REACTIONS TO PLAYING SPORTS

Many athletes get tense or nervous before or during games, meets or matches. This happens even to pro athletes. Please read each question. Then, circle the number that says how you USUALLY feel before or while you compete in sports. There are no right or wrong answers. Please be as truthful as you can.

<u>Before or while I compete in sports:</u>	Not At	A Little	Pretty Much	Ver y
1. It is hard to concentrate on the game.	1	2	3	4
2. My body feels tense.	1	2	3	4
3. I worry that I will not play well.	1	2	3	4
4. It is hard for me to focus on what I am do.	1	2	3	4
5. I worry that I will let others down.	1	2	3	4
 <u>Before or while I compete in sports:</u>				
	Not At	A Little	Pretty Much	Ver y
6. I feel tense in my stomach.	1	2	3	4
7. I lose focus on the game.	1	2	3	4
8. I worry that I will not play my best.	1	2	3	4
9. I worry that I will play badly.	1	2	3	4
10. My muscles feel shaky.	1	2	3	4
 <u>Before or while I compete in sports:</u>				
	Not At	A Little	Pretty Much	Ver y
11. I worry that I will mess up during the game.	1	2	3	4
12. My stomach feels upset.	1	2	3	4
13. I cannot think clearly during the game.	1	2	3	4
14. My muscles feel tight because I am nervous.	1	2	3	4
15. I have a hard time focusing on what my me to do.	1	2	3	4

Scoring Key. Somatic: Items 2, 6, 10, 12, 14; Worry: Items 3, 5, 8, 9, 11; Concentration

Disruption: Items 1, 4, 7, 13, 15.

Appendix H: ACSI-28: Survey of Athletic Experiences

Directions: A number of statements that athletes have used to describe their experiences are given below. Please read each statement carefully and then recall as accurately as possible how often you experience the same thing. There are no right or wrong answers. Do not spend too much time on any one statement.

	Almost Always	Almost Never		
1. On a daily or weekly basis, I set very specific goals for myself that guide what I do.	1	2	3	4
2. I get the most out of my talent and skills.	1	2	3	4
3. When a coach or manager tells me how to correct a mistake I've made, I tend to take it personally and feel upset.	1	2	3	4
4. When I am playing sports, I can focus my attention and block out distractions.	1	2	3	4
5. I remain positive and enthusiastic during competition, no matter how badly things are going.	1	2	3	4
6. I tend to play better under pressure because I think more clearly.	1	2	3	4
7. I worry quite a bit about what others think about my performance.	1	2	3	4
8. I tend to do lots of planning about how to reach my goals.	1	2	3	4
9. I feel confident that I will play well.	1	2	3	4

10. When a coach or manager criticizes me, I become upset rather than helped. 1 2 3 4
11. It is easy for me to keep distracting thoughts from interfering with something I am watching or listening to. 1 2 3 4
12. I put a lot of pressure on myself by worrying how I will perform. 1 2 3 4
13. I set my own performance goals for each practice. 1 2 3 4
14. I don't have to be pushed to practice or play hard; I give 100%. 1 2 3 4
15. If a coach criticizes or yells at me, I correct the mistake without getting upset about it. 1 2 3 4
16. I handle unexpected situations in my sport very well. 1 2 3 4
17. When things are going badly, I tell myself to keep calm, and this works for me. 1 2 3 4
18. The more pressure there is during a game, the more I enjoy it. 1 2 3 4
19. While competing, I worry about making mistakes or failing to come through. 1 2 3 4
20. I have my own game plan worked out in my head long before the game begins. 1 2 3 4

- 21. When I feel myself getting too tense, I can quickly relax my body and calm myself. 1 2 3 4

- 22. To me, pressure situations are challenges that I welcome. 1 2 3 4

- 23. I think about and imagine what will happen if I fail or screw up. 1 2 3 4

- 24. I maintain emotional control no matter how things are going for me. 1 2 3 4

- 25. It is easy for me to direct my attention and focus on a single object or person. 1 2 3 4

- 26. When I fail to reach my goals, it makes me try even harder. . . 1 2 3 4

- 27. I improve my skills by listening carefully to advice and instruction from coaches and managers. 1 2 3 4

- 28. I make fewer mistakes when the pressure's on because I concentrate better. 1 2 3 4

ACSI-28 Scoring

- 1. Coping with Adversity** – add items 5, 17, 21 & 24.
- 2. Peaking under Pressure** – add items 6, 18 , 22 & 28.
- 3. Goal Setting/Mental Preparation** – add items 1, 8, 13 & 20.
- 4. Concentration** -- add items 4, 11, 16 & 25.
- 5. Freedom from Worry** – add items 7, 12, 19 & 23.
- 6. Confidence and Achievement Motivation** – add items 2, 9, 14 & 26.
- 7. Coachability** -- add items 3, 10, 15 & 27.
- 8. Total Score** -- add 7 subscale scores.