LOVE IN BASKETBALL

Transforming Inappropriate Power in Men's College Basketball Coaching through a Servant-Led Response and Companionate Love

—ADAM GIERLACH

In the summer of 2003, the Baylor University's men's basketball program was ripped apart when student-athlete Carlton Dotson murdered his teammate and roommate, Patrick Dennehy. While the details surrounding the events directly leading to Dotson shooting and killing Dennehy are still unknown, the abhorrent tale, which weaves a tapestry of drug use, gun violence, and unstable behavior, was held as an example of the moral decay of big-money college sports. And it remains the only known case of a student-athlete killing a teammate in the history of U.S. intercollegiate athletics (Wise, 2008).

The story fails to simply end with tragic violence. Shortly after a memorial service for Dennehy, further details exposed the deception, lies, manipulation, and attempted cover-up by Dave Bliss, the head men's basketball coach at Baylor from 1999-2003, and during Dotson's murder of Dennehy (Dewitt, 2008; Wise, 2003, 2017). Bliss had previously served as the head coach at Southern Methodist University, where he evaded allegations that his players were paid, a violation of National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA, the governing body for U.S. intercollegiate athletics) legislation. And in the aftermath and investigations surrounding the shooting, it was discovered that Dennehy, along with another Baylor player, were not on athletic scholarship

provided by the university, as would be expected for a player of Dennehy's ability. Instead, Bliss himself made payments directly to cover tuition costs not fulfilled by financial aid for Dennehy. As investigations furthered and officials closed in on the basketball office's illegitimate activity that would surely lead to punishments levied by the NCAA and his firing, Bliss's panic set in. He attempted a frenzied grab to survive, to save his own job and reputation, his own ego. In his desperate attempts to exercise power and control, Bliss coerced his coaching staff by instilling fear through threatening termination for those unwilling to go along, and even enrolled other student-athletes in an elaborate scheme to lie to the local sheriff and NCAA investigators, defaming Dennehy as a drug dealer to pay for his tuition and a deal gone wrong that lead to his death. In conversations with student-athletes recorded by assistant coach Abar Rouse, who turned to secretly recording meetings after his initial hesitation to carry out the scheme was met with a threat to his job, Bliss tells three players, "what we have to do here is create the perception that Pat was a dealer" (Wise, 2017, para. 20). In additional conversations, Bliss further seeks to deceive investigators and use others to save himself, suggesting to student-athletes that they could tell different stories: "It doesn't have to be the same story. It just has to have the same ending" (Wise, 2003, para. 30).

The ending of this story for Dave Bliss is that he resigned from his position as head men's basketball coach at Baylor University in August 2003, after the recorded conversations were made public, and a fuller picture of Bliss's leadership embedded in inappropriate power drive and ambition was revealed. Following a show-cause penalty from the NCAA that largely prevented him from coaching at the Division-I level for the next ten years, Bliss went on to coach at the NAIA and high school levels, and in the professional minor leagues (Dewitt, 2008; Wise, 2017). In his own book, titled *Fall to Grace: The Climb, Collapse, and*

Comeback of Coach Dave Bliss, and in the documentary, *Disgraced*, detailing Dotson's murder of Dennehy and the events surrounding Baylor men's basketball during that fateful summer, Bliss paints the picture of a redeemed man accepting personal responsibility (Bliss et al., 2015; Kondelis, 2017). Yet, with Bliss believing the cameras to be off, in a setting similar to Rouse discretely recording his boss all those years earlier, Bliss continues to disparage Dennehy, and concludes with the following: "What I did was, I got in the mud with the pigs. And I paid a price and the pigs liked it" (Kondelis, 2017, 1:15:43). The viewer is left to make sense of this on their own. And perhaps in that moment, Bliss once again reveals the accrual of his leadership embedded in inappropriate power over a lifetime, and exposes the nature of such leadership.

It may be easy to write off the Baylor men's basketball scandal as an extreme example. But similar examples of such leadership centered in inappropriate power drive and ambition in men's college basketball coaching pull through our current age. Multiple reports detail an FBI investigation made public in 2017, that focused on the deep underbelly of men's college basketball recruiting, with coaches being paid tens of thousands of dollars to steer highly-touted prospects to agents and apparel companies (Gasaway, 2017; Schlabach, 2017). The investigation resulted in federal charges of fraud and corruption levied against four assistant coaches at Arizona, Auburn, Oklahoma State, and Southern California, prominent Division-I men's basketball programs. Subsequent audio recordings made public during federal trials reveal the activity of not just the assistant coaches, but the prominent role current head coaches often play in directing payments to highly-rated prospects and current student-athletes (Forde et al., 2019; Norlander, 2019; Schlabach & Lavigne, 2018). Will Wade, who remained the head coach at Louisiana State University until March 2022, three years after specific

details of his involvement were revealed, displays particular frustration with a third-party involved in the recruitment over a prospect who had yet to accept Wade's offer:

> I'm [expletive] tired of dealing with the thing. Like I'm just [expletive] sick of dealing with the [expletive]. Like, this should not be that [expletive] complicated…I went to him with a [expletive] strong-ass offer about a month ago. [Expletive] strong. (Forde et al., 2019, para. 3-6)

This expletive-laden tirade may simply represent Wade's frustration over the situation, rather than attempts at control and manipulation. But when placed in a larger context of men's college basketball coaching and the landscape of high-stakes college basketball recruiting, Wade's violent language portray in image similar to that of Bliss. Perhaps we hear an individual seeking to assert dominance, protect his own livelihood, and satisfy one's ego through wielding abusive power when circumstances fail to move forward in the manner in which he is wanting.

Perhaps more notable in recent years is the physical and verbal abuse of student-athletes and assistant coaches by former Wichita State head men's basketball coach, Gregg Marshall. Marshall had been widely regarded as one of the best coaches in the profession, leading Wichita State to seven consecutive NCAA tournament appearances from 2011-2018, and an improbable run to the Final Four in 2013. Yet a large amount of student-athlete transfers out of the program indicated perhaps that something internally was amiss. In a journalistic investigation featuring 26 program student-athletes and 10 assistant coaches, Goodman (2020) chronicles Marshall's extensive abuse from 2015-2018, which included punching a student-athlete twice, choking an assistant coach, and mocking the Native American heritage of a student-athlete. In the words of one former Wichita State assistant coach, "he's a maniac, a bully" (Goodman, 2020, para. 7).

Instances of leadership embedded in inappropriate power, and accompanying manifestations of displays of abuse, manipulation, self-embeddedness and violence, seem to be common practice in recent years as well. John Brannen, former head men's basketball coach at the University of Cincinnati, was fired in May 2021 due to using tactics of intimidation and providing benefits prohibited by NCAA legislation to a student athlete (Jenkins, 2021). Two head coaches have resigned over the last two seasons due to using racial slurs and racially insensitive language around student athletes, and at least two more have been investigated by their universities for similar comments ("Basketball coach out," 2021; Borzello, 2020, 2021; Hanson, 2021). These are just some of the examples of which we have public record.

While on one hand these examples might merely represent extreme cases, perhaps this represents only the tip of the iceberg, with actions and behaviors so alarming that they warranted headlines. As shown with Rouse's recordings of Bliss, and through federal, internal, NCAA, and journalistic investigations, much more goes on behind closed doors, and outside of the view of the public. But the strings of the thread of leadership centered in inappropriate power drive remain. Such leadership can neutrally be characterized as hierarchy-driven, rules-based, and authoritative, "centered in power and control of others" (Tilghman-Havens, 2018, p. 91), and accompanied by "satisfying the ego, acquiring material possessions, or wielding abusive power" (Hammermeister et al., 2008, p. 186). As highlighted by Ferch (2022), the tendencies of this power "wound the world, leaving in their wake systemic power abuses of all forms, severe lack of emotional intelligence, hyper-rational lack of love" (p. 95). This is not a power that liberates or empowers, but manipulates and controls, dominates and suppresses. With leadership embedded in such inappropriate power drive regularly occurring in men's college basketball coaching, the purpose of this paper is to more

greatly understand the expression, manifestations, and consequences of such leadership, explore a possible transformation arc and inward journey toward a servant-led response and more healthy expression of power, and examine how such a response may be sustained, and what might be experienced as a result, in men's college basketball coaching with a foundation of servant-leadership and an emotional culture of companionate love.

AN EXPLORATION OF LEADERSHIP EMBEDDED IN INAPPROPRIATE POWER

Greater understandings of the inappropriate power drive and ambition experienced in men's college basketball coaching leads to an examination of power as conceived by Friedrich Nietzsche (1968), as Tilghman-Havens (2018) highlights that Nietzsche's work "paved the way for a leadership centered in power and control of others" (p. 91). With life making no objective sense for Nietzsche (1968), he concludes that life is the expression of will, the desire to control others, and express values over them: "…do you want a name for this world? A solution for all its riddles? A light for you, too, you best-concealed, strongest, most intrepid, most midnightly men? - This world is the will to power - and nothing besides!" (p. 550). What is left is to assert dominance and control over others. And the healthiest of all instincts then becomes wanting "to have and to want to have more" (p. 77). For Nietzsche, this acquiring of more material possessions, positions of status and power, and expressions of dominance over others is growth, and represents life itself. Through these conceptions, power may be seen more as an entity to gain through a position of dominance. If an individual gains power, then others lose power. And if the healthiest of instincts is to have and to want to have more, then it serves individuals to exert power over others to acquire, or remain of, a higher status. This is demonstrated through themes such as "resistance, conflict, force, domination, and control,"

based in a "'win-lose and 'power-over' conceptual basis" (Freeman & Bourque, 2001, p. 10). In such entity-based conceptions of power, those at the top of the hierarchy are also inclined to hoard their positions of dominance. One often becomes more embedded in dominance and control over others as one continues to enact such conceptions of power.

In the examples of men's college basketball coaching highlighted thus far, each coach might claim drivers for their actions beyond having and to want to have more. Gregg Marshall, in a statement released after allegations were made public, claimed to have respect for all his players, believing in their value as athletes, students, and people, and calling himself a "motivator, a pusher, someone who can tap into their greatest potential" (Selbe, 2020, para. 5). Perhaps a lot of men's college basketball coaches would view their role and describe themselves in this way. But a disconnect remains between how Marshall describes himself and the extreme power abuses he carried out toward those around him. A different coach might describe himself in the same way, but instead express power in a way that liberates and empowers. What's actually underneath, what's below the surface-level description of how Marshall views himself, is still to be illuminated. In the example with the most information at hand, in which recordings are available that captured thoughts and reflections underneath behaviors expressed, and unvarnished by the clouding of a public veil, Bliss hints at his motivations: "That could save us" (Wise, 2017, para. 20). While Bliss does not draw an explicit line to motivations of satisfying his ego or acquiring material possessions, one could reasonably say his actions have the impact of abusing power. When faced with the welfare of student-athletes and staff members entrusted to his care, Bliss chose the route of manipulation and control over others. One might argue these behaviors came from a place of service, and trying to save a program that would surely go under if the truth was revealed. But the actions expressed,

intentionally disparaging former student-athletes, covering up illicit behavior, and demanding compliance from staff members and student-athletes, more greatly align with a power-over conceptual basis, centered in dominance and control. As one asserts leadership imbedded in an inappropriate will to power, harming others then becomes the cost of doing business, a necessary consequence: "All of us are today advocates of life. — We immoralists are today the strongest power: the other great powers need us—we construe the world in our image" (Nietzsche, 1968, p. 71). With the will to power at the forefront, this adds up to a vision for leadership of suppressing individual difference through making others in one's own image, becoming embroiled in competitive ego battles, without concern for harm to others through the process, to place oneself above others as one strives to have, and continuous taking and the diminishment of others in shows of strength and superiority in attempts to want to have more.

The Lens of Contempt

The specific examples highlighted provide visceral understandings of the negative impacts of such leadership. The father of one student-athlete who endured body-shaming physical and verbal abuse from Marshall, highlighted that his son has dealt with ongoing anxiety and depression: "Not only did he [Marshall] ruin his basketball career, but he's [Marshall's] ruined his life" (Goodman, 2020, para. 35). At the heart of displays of power and attempting to demonstrate superiority over others is contempt. And viewing leadership embedded in inappropriate power, centered in control and domination over others, through the lens of contempt provide a fuller picture for its expression and manifestations, and deeper understandings of the consequences such ways of being in the world have in interpersonal relationships and larger systems, such as an athletic team context. Contempt, a member of the contempt-anger-disgust triad (Rozin et al., 1999), serves to punitively enforce

hierarchical norms through behaviors meant to convey superiority while further distancing one individual from the other (Morris & Keltner, 2000) through exclusionary actions (Fischer & Roseman, 2007) with strong condescension and disapproval (Izard, 1977). Displays of contempt serve a "status-altering function" (Melwani & Barsade, 2011, p. 504), leading to a drop in status for the recipient of contempt while attempting to highlight the strength and superiority of the actor (Keltner & Haidt, 1999). In marriages, the negative impacts of contempt have been well established by Gottman's (1993) groundbreaking research, which found emotional displays of contempt as the single most important factor in predicting the irreparable fracture of a marriage. This research further characterizes contempt as expressions of scorn and ridicule (Gottman, 1993). But until Melwani and Barsade (2011), contempt and its psychological, interpersonal, and performance consequences, had rarely been examined in a work context. Examining contempt in three different power-status relationships, including those in which one actor is considered high-power and the other actor is considered low-power, Melwani and Barsade (2011) found that being a recipient of contempt for low-power status individuals did lead to significantly increased performance quality when measured in the short-term. However, it is possible this improved performance quality may only be connected to specific tasks. Contempt focuses attention and raises energy (Melwani & Barsade, 2011), but Barsade (Crowley, 2020) herself highlights that in these states, thinking also becomes rigid and decision quality decreases, leading to negative outcomes over time, and especially in more complex tasks. The tasks performed in the experiment were largely routine cognitive tasks that did not require partnership, interpersonal relationships, and emotional and relational capacities that we see in a team sport like basketball, or any relational endeavor.

When Melwani and Barsade (2011) shifted the lens away from

performance outcomes, they found "these higher performance outcomes did not occur without a cost" (p. 516), stating that "the long-term effects of contempt may be quite severe" (p. 516). This may be one of the dangers of contempt and leadership centered in power and control. It gives the illusion of producing a positive outcome for oneself and for others in the immediacy through a temporary boost in performance, without seeing the disastrous downstream consequences. The surge of energy experienced by individuals on the receiving end of contempt may result in feelings of depletion over time and emotional exhaustion, which are connected to decreased performance (Schmeichel et al., 2003). Being on the receiving end of contempt, especially for lower-status recipients, threatened implicit self-esteem, which further led to a rise in interpersonal aggression. Research also shows that continued decreases in self-esteem, such as those experienced by individuals on the receiving end of contempt, may result in one then becoming fixated on trying to increase self-esteem, a state that reduces learning and interpersonal relationships (Crocker & Park, 2004). And in adolescents, decreased self-esteem mediates decreased leader self-efficacy and leader emergence (Liu et al., 2019). When considered in full, the effects of such a seemingly inconsequential action of any expression of contempt, which first presents with the positive impact of raised performance, are indeed quite severe. Cognitive, emotional, and relational deficits emerge. And these impacts connect to decreased leader capacity over time. Basketball coaches expressing a behavior of contempt perhaps trade a short-term boost in performance for overwhelmingly negative impacts over time, that one could reasonably say results in the diminishment of others as persons. But the short-term boost in performance experienced would then result in a much longer tail of decreased performance. When analyzing servant-leader coach behavior in high school basketball contexts, Rieke et al. (2008), draw on their findings to suggest "that 'winning-at-all-cost'

coach behaviors are not necessary, nor desirable, for winning outcomes"
(p. 236). Rieke et al. (2008) further outline several winning-at-all-cost
coach behaviors, including rule infractions, illegal recruitment of
student-athletes, and abusive behavior towards players and officials,
mirroring several of the examples provided thus far of men's college
basketball coaches centered in power and control. This reduction in
leadership capacity experienced by a lower-status recipient of contempt,
through decreased leader self-efficacy and leader emergence, is perhaps
amplified in collegiate student-athletes, who undergo a critical period of
neurodevelopment that starts in adolescence and ends in the late
twenties. As highlighted by Jay (2013), outside of early childhood
development, this period is considered to be the most critical period of
keeping neural networks and connections that are used, while allowing
those that are unused to die off. During this stage, most of the
neurodevelopment occurs in the frontal lobe, the area of the brain
concerned with executive function, forward thinking, and more greatly
seeing shades of gray rather than black-and-white reasoning or solutions
(Jay, 2013). Essentially, this stage is where twenty somethings learn "the
language of adulthood," and the rewiring that occurs during this stage of
development "primes us to learn about the complex challenges of
adulthood" (Jay, 2013, p. 141). During a critical stage of development in
which individuals learn about the challenges of adulthood, being a
recipient of leadership embedded in inappropriate power greatly
increases the likelihood of hardwiring cycles of contempt accompanied
by a worldview for leadership as control and dominance, competition,
and status-striving.

And these are indeed cycles. As a young assistant coach in Division-
I men's college basketball desiring to achieve my dream of advancing
through the ranks and becoming a successful coach at the top of the
profession, I perpetuated behaviors of contempt, creating darkness and

diminishment within others. When those above me in the hierarchies in which I operated demanded loyalty and sacrifice, I created false hierarchies, relationships based on deficit, and displays of strength and superiority over others. This showed up in subtle ways such as a preoccupation with status and appearance, worrying about advancing up the ladder in college basketball rather than serving those entrusted to my care, and frantically grinding away long hours in the office to prove my worth to myself and others from a place of low self-esteem. But the impacts were perhaps more noticeable in my relationships. When a student-athlete committed a mistake, my response was sharp and critical, often attacked them as persons, and did little to express care or support. And even without some sort of mistake that might serve as a justification for my behavior, I was withdrawn, lacking life-giving and life-affirming emotional expression, and withheld encouragement. When I was met with perceived career stagnation, I responded rigidly, and the only way I knew how. I worked even harder, becoming more closed off to those around me. As stated by Melwani and Barsade (2011), "contempt breeds contempt and thus could start a contemptuous cycle in which the recipient's attempt to right the balance with more contempt may generate an even stronger response from the original agent" (p. 516). Such vicious cycles can cause a disintegration of relationships altogether (Hareli & Rafaeli, 2008), and Gottman's (1993) research similarly highlights the negative impact of contempt on interpersonal relationships. Given the disastrous impact of contempt on interpersonal relationships in marriages and in work contexts, we could reasonably expect to see similar relational consequences in men's college basketball. With leadership embedded in the will to power as demonstrated through expressions of contempt, it appears that most college basketball programs indeed experience the harmful impacts of contemptuous cycles. Division-I transfers in men's college basketball have risen from 577 in 2012 to 1751

in 2022, with a steady increase over time ("Transfers," 2022). When averaged across the 358 Division-I institutions, about one-third of each team changed programs. There are many factors that have led to these dramatic increases, including most recently a one-time exemption that allows student-athletes to transfer institutions without penalty. However, this data still presents a stark reality of breakdowns, disintegration, and fracture of relationships through impoverished relational capacity and leadership centered in power and control at the forefront. An examination into servant-leadership in high school basketball coaches found that student-athletes were less satisfied with their sport experience and felt they were not being treated well from coaches who relied on an authoritative, autocratic, or oppressive style (Rieke et al., 2008). Additionally, these same student-athletes felt they were receiving worse training and instruction than student-athletes whose coaches who practiced more life-giving leadership styles (Rieke et al., 2008). A coach centered in power and control might highlight perhaps that student-athletes may not be tough enough to cut it under such a demanding coach. Greg Marshall himself highlighted that "my coaching style isn't for everyone" (Selbe, 2020, para. 5). Yet, Rieke et al. (2008) paint a different picture:

> The results of this study seem to suggest that the 'keys' to promoting mental toughness do not lie in this autocratic, authoritarian, oppressive style. It appears to lie, paradoxically, with the coach's ability to produce an environment, which emphasizes trust and inclusion, humility, and service. (p. 235)

While many factors, including changes in NCAA legislation and shifts in youth sports culture, are at play regarding the drastic rise of transfers in Division-I men's college basketball, this research seems to suggest that leadership centered in power and control, characterized by an authoritative, autocratic, and oppressive style, is not a small

contributor. Being a recipient of such leadership leads to a decrease in satisfaction, one's sense of being treated well, and mental skills, all while creating the perception that student-athlete is receiving worse coaching. One could reasonably see how these impacts could lead to the dissolution of relationships, and why a student-athlete would transfer institutions from such an environment. My own experience holds this reality as well. After engaging in a decade of coaching in college basketball and ways of being with myself and others that drove contempt, I experienced the dissolution of a long-term personal relationship, disconnection from former colleagues and student-athletes, isolation from family (both physically and emotionally), and life lacking meaning. Such are the consequences of leadership embedded in inappropriate power with contempt as its partner and physical expression.

A DIFFERENT PATH FORWARD

Despite the disastrous immediate and downstream consequences of men's college basketball coaching embedded in inappropriate power, the path to a different way of being might remain shrouded in mystery. Oftentimes as one pursues control and domination, having and wanting to have more, the more one becomes trapped in inappropriate power. Cycles of contempt hardwired alongside a worldview of successful leadership as dominance, "sanctions, in a conspicuous way, a pernicious and petty status striving that corrupts everyone" (Greenleaf, 1977/2002, p. 78). Leadership becomes synonymous with control. Moving beyond these cycles requires a shift in will altogether, away from self-embeddedness and toward something larger than oneself. This might ultimately be viewed as a shift in consciousness. Václav Havel, former playwright and president of the Czech Republic highlights that "consciousness precedes being, and not the other way around," (as cited in Ferch, 2012, p. 115). Pursuing power as an end in itself fails to provide the requisite shifts that would produce outward changes in ways

of being with ourselves and others. Viktor Frankl (2014), in *The Will to Meaning*, states that "power, rather than being an end in itself, is actually the means to an end…only if one's original concern with meaning fulfillment is frustrated is one either content with power or intent on pleasure" (p. 20). He highlights both power and pleasure as derivatives of a more primary and life-giving concern, meaning. When life calls us forth and demands a response to its situations, it becomes necessary to move into life, to respond to life by being responsible. In *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning*, Frankl (2000) expands his reflection: "Man is responsible for fulfilling the meaning of his life. Being human means responding to life situations, replying to the questions they ask. Being human means answering these calls…It is the patient who must answer them" (p. 120). For Frankl, meaning fulfillment comes through the self-transcendent nature of human existence. For it remains that all that has ever been accomplished has been achieved only in the context of human relationships. Thus, being human necessarily involves others: "Self-transcendence is the essence of existence. Being human is directed to something other than itself" (Frankl, 2014, p. 33). Luckily, Frankl (2014) provides clues that illuminate the path forward for a few ways in which one might find meaning through being directed toward something other than itself. These look like creating a work, experiencing the goodness and beauty of the world and life itself, or encountering the very uniqueness of another human being. Leadership embedded in inappropriate power remains an inward facing stance. Construing others in our own image, having and wanting to have more, and diminishing those around us to elevate ourselves necessarily involve being directed toward oneself. And as a result, self-actualization through meaning fulfillment remains elusive, a never-ending quest on a hamster-wheel existence for the leader embedded in the will to power.

An Alternative Conception of Power

As Shannon (1998) reflects, "leaders who see their strength only in their alleged 'power' are understandably reluctant to share that strength" (p. 282). But power contains not only a shadow side used for domination and control of the many at the hands of expansion for the few. Foucault (1980) highlights that "power would be a fragile thing if its only function were to repress, if it only worked through the mode of censorship, exclusion, blockage, and repression…exercising itself only in a negative way" (p. 59). The fragile nature of negative power is well-displayed through Division-I men's college basketball by coaches, teams, and programs that crumble to the ground, that fall in on themselves through power that limits. When viewing this type of negative power, there seems to come a time when the slightest breeze sends these individuals and groups toppling over. However, shadow does not exist without light. Men's college basketball coaches need not remain embedded in an inappropriate power that creates vicious cycles of contempt felt first within oneself and then cast out onto others. And if there is to be a negative expression of power, there are also to be more life-giving expressions and foundations that illuminate the path forward. There is a life-force and vitality to power. Power can inspire movement and freedom, serving as the internal will that brings an individual forward. Power has the capacity to make things new, rather than merely suppress. Power becomes something that builds. As Foucault (1980) reflects, "it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse" (p. 119). And in this new form, the structure and essence of power changes, from something entity-based that results in gaining and hoarding, to something more distributed. For Foucault (1980), power "needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body" (p. 119). In these conceptions power is no longer an entity tied to position, status, and domination. When

distributed throughout a system, false win-lose binaries begin to dissolve, and a new path forward, away from leadership embedded in inappropriate power, emerges.

LEADER AS SERVANT FIRST

When power is released from the hands of the few, what springs forth perhaps is power in the hands of those around the leader. And when its previous function was domination and control, the function of leadership then shifts to active liberation, and building the power of others. Robert Greenleaf (1977/2002) conceived of such leadership when he described the leader as servant first, as opposed to leader first, stating: "The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served" (p. 27). This difference between servant first and leader first is bolstered by Greenleaf's (1977/2002) best test:

> The best test, and difficult to administer is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived? (p. 27)

Through these foundational definitions for the servant-leader, Greenleaf (1977/2002) directly confronts the leadership embedded in inappropriate power while offering an alternative path. He distinguishes the servant-leader as "sharply different from one who is leader first," positing that leader first behaviors might derive from "the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions" (p. 27). Greenleaf directs the servant-leader away from the lower priority needs of pleasure and power, or merely the effects and means of meaning fulfillment, and toward something other than oneself, bringing about relationships, teams, and organizations characterized by vitality and

collective growth through enhanced relational capacity. As Ferch (2022) reflects, "I can't bend my family members' or friends' arms behind their backs and force them to tell others I've become less toxic or more loving, more whole" (p. 97). Submitting to others and the forces of life that lead toward transcendence bring about a journey of collective growth and fuller potentialities. In seeking to become more whole, Ferch (2022) highlights that "I've either done the life work required and their voice resounds freely or I need to seek more healing" (p. 97).

Responding to the best test of servant-leadership presents a different definition of growth than the definition offered by Nietzsche. And seeking more healing so that those served can become wiser, healthier, freer, more autonomous, more likely to become servants present a further shift toward a healthier expression of power. Even a seemingly noble leadership theory, transformational leadership, which includes "other-centered constructs such as intellectual stimulation and individual consideration," still places "organizational objectives and preference to value performance above human need" (Reynolds, 2014, p. 44). Perhaps it stands to reason that the objectives and goals of teams should be pursued above the developmental and community needs of those who comprise such groups. However, placing objectives and performance above humanity, in a context that contrives leadership as power and control, may result in unnecessary competition and status-striving at best, and emboldening "the dominant in oppressing the marginalized" (Tilghman-Havens, 2018, p. 92) at worst. Perhaps one is returned to same place as leadership centered in power and control, just with a more benevolent disposition. In a study of servant-leadership coaching in collegiate sports, Hammermeister et al. (2008) unearthed the benevolent dictator as a coach leader archetype. These individuals, in addition to servant-leader coaches, were connected to many positive outcomes for their student-athletes, such as athlete satisfaction, intrinsic motivation,

and task orientation, particularly when compared with poor or weak leaders. While servant-leaders were perceived well above the mean by their student-athletes on trust/inclusion, humility, and service, the term benevolent dictator "describes a leader who emphasizes building trust and inclusive relationships and is service-oriented, yet is also low on humility and high on power and control" (Hammermeister et al., 2008). Perhaps it is in this lack of humility from the benevolent dictator in which the true grace and strength of the servant-leader, that provides for a healthier expression of power and a foundation for more life-giving leadership in men's college basketball coaching, is revealed.

The Journey of Healing and Reconciliation

Shann Ray Ferch (2012) highlights the critical importance of humility for the journey of healing and reconciliation at the core of servant-leadership:

> To live with the power involved in servant leadership, not a power that dominates or controls, but a power that heals, restores, and reconciles, one needs humility. The servant leader submits to the forces of life that lead away from self-embeddedness and toward the kind of transcendence that is capable of leading and healing the self and beloved others. (p. 92)

At the essence of this reflection from Ferch is a stance of obedience or submission to others and their growth as persons. Engaging in leadership centered in power and control, without requisite humility, is inevitably limited and limiting. This leader limits others to one way of being, and by seeking to demonstrate strength or superiority over others, this leader attempts ensure that the growth of others will remain lesser than that of the leader. As Greenleaf (1977/2002) states, "with one person at the top, the full scope of leadership is limited to that one person, no matter how large the institution" (p. 77). Submitting to

others and the forces of life that lead toward transcendence bring about a journey of collective growth and fuller potentialities. The servant-leader is called to engage in expansive capacities beyond one's own will and current perspectives.

This journey often moves through forgiveness-asking. In seeking respond to life through the questions it asked on my journey, I turned to reflection and searched for feedback from others, to more greatly understand the cycles of darkness and diminishment I had caused within those around me. I went to my fractured relationship and listened to her while seeking to understand all the ways I had caused hurt, pain, and division within her. And I went to the student-athletes I coached and asked what I did that caused darkness within them, both on and off the court. As I considered my path and who I became along the way, I could no longer accept that causing harm to others was a legitimate cost of personal achievement, of the will to power. I asked for their forgiveness, and sought to change, to do the life work required.

Reconciliation did not happen for me with all parties, even though it seemed close at times. Even without the granting of forgiveness, the process of asking for it allowed me to chart a path forward, moving towards meaningful change by acknowledging the darkness and diminishment I have caused. Asking for forgiveness from the student-athletes with which I worked, dealing with the real situation, granted me the freedom to be with them in a more life-giving way. Seeing the fullness of the unintended consequences of my actions, and attending to them, cultivated the choice to then walk a different path. As Ferch (2012) highlights, acknowledging the power is in their hands, is a critical step for the servant-leader:

> Usually the leader who commands and controls has good intentions even while failing to see the impact of diminishment he or she is having on others. Attending to this impact, even giving others voice

to articulate the ways they feel diminished in our presence, and then making a meaningful response to their desires, brings about relationships and organizations characterized by vitality and joy. (p. 73)

Greenleaf (1998) later amended his best test for servant-leadership, highlighting a scar that "will endure to be reckoned with" for causing harm to others, that results in greater self-questioning and more responsible action (p. 45). Whether or not forgiveness is granted, engaging in true reconciliation and forgiveness-asking allows one to witness the harm caused as a result of one's actions, perhaps solidifying or illuminating those scars, charting a course toward meaningful change, and continuing the shift from self-embeddedness and inappropriate power toward servant-leadership and a more life-giving response.

EMOTIONAL CULTURES OF COMPANIONATE LOVE

Shifting the power to the hands of those around the leader to bring about teams characterized by vitality and joy, moves through other-oriented ways of being in the world, and relational bonds characterized by connection and increased closeness. Highlighting the number one lesson he's learned over his lifetime, Spears (as cited in Song, 2020) encourages others to "show people that they matter to you" (p. 89). This can certainly have a broad range of expressions, from showing love to sharing appreciation, and Spears (as cited in Song, 2020) reminds us that "we can all demonstrate through large-and-small ways that we value those around us" (p. 89). The cultures of fear, anger, disgust, and contempt, so prevalent in leadership centered in power and control, stand in sharp contrast to emotional cultures of companionate love. The expression of companionate love engages the other-oriented emotions of affection, care, compassion, and tenderness (Barsade & O'Neill, 2014), and continues the path toward self-transcendence.

Seemingly uncommon in many workplace cultures, Barsade and O'Neill (2014) asks us to envision a culture of companionate love in a workplace context:

> First imagine a pair of coworkers collaborating side by side, each day expressing caring and affection toward one another, safeguarding each other's feelings, showing tenderness and compassion when things don't go well, and supporting each other in work and non-work matters. Then expand this image to an entire network of dyadic and group interactions so that this type of caring, affection, tenderness, and compassion occurs frequently within most of the dyads and groups throughout the entire social unit. (p. 553)

A culture of companionate love, an emotional culture, differs greatly from cognitive or behavioral cultures primarily researched in organizational life, and more greatly connects to the vitality and joy characteristic of healthy relationships. Whereas cognitive culture is expressed through ideas and a set of cognitions shared by members of a group (O'Reilly et al., 1991), perhaps more surface level understandings, an examination of emotional culture might better provide insights into the consciousness that precedes being within a group. There is a large difference between how an organization is articulated on paper and how people within an organization are in relationship with one another (Greenleaf, 1996). As a result, emotional culture might help us to better understand the relational bonds that impact how individuals actually function within relationships and teams. Companionate love is expressed verbally and non-verbally, through behaviors, artifacts, and other visible expressions. This includes facial expression, body language, and tone, and also physical touch, individualized consideration, and group rituals. The essence of leadership for Greenleaf (1998) is indeed in making the effort first, and taking the first step to provide "a clear demonstration of

intent to build a more honest relationship" (p. 85). Whereas contempt creates distance between individuals and seeks to further that distance, actions of servant-leadership and companionate love bring persons closer together. When Barsade and O'Neill (2014) first present a vision for companionate love, they ask us to imagine individuals collaborating side by side. While collaboration in close quarters may not directly represent care, affection, compassion, and tenderness, close proximity is often a powerful first step towards caring. Greenleaf (1998) mirrors this sentiment: "So much of caring depends upon knowing and interacting with persons in the intimacy of propinquity" (p. 22). This closeness emerges as a key element of servant-leadership in athletics as well. In a qualitative study of Division-III collegiate football coaches, Westre (2008) found close relationships among athletes and coaches to be an important theme that characterized servant-leader practices of the specific coaches interviewed:

> The coaches felt that a deeper relationship among teammates contributed to a more significant commitment in serving each other. Also, the willingness to serve one another would more likely be enhanced by the coach's effort to create a strong bond between themselves and the athlete. The coaches felt that it was extremely important to get to know and understand each individual athlete if they wanted to serve their needs effectively. (p. 132)

In this being in close kinship with one another, we are likely to find several of the ten characteristics of servant-leadership, identified by Larry Spears (1998) through Greenleaf's writings, such as listening, empathy, healing, and building community. And through this intimacy and closeness with another the servant-leader becomes an actor of companionate love, generating emotions of care, affection, compassion, and tenderness, rather than being a passive recipient of feeling. For bell hooks (2018), this means engaging in "the practice of loving" (p. 25).

Without falling in love in a passive way, engaging in the practice of loving requires a choice and commitment, "to love truly and deeply, to give and receive a love that lasts" (p. 188). This love, matching M. Scott Peck's definition, is defined as "the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth" (as cited in hooks, 2018, p. 4). Similar to companionate love, it is demonstrated through both verbal and nonverbal behaviors, and is not just associated with feeling, but also the actions of care, affection, respect, responsibility, and more.

   As the research of Barsade and O'Neill (2014) shows, this love indeed lasts and spreads profound positive ripples across teams. In a longitudinal study performed in a long-term care setting, a culture of companionate love predicted job satisfaction, better teamwork, and less emotional exhaustion and absenteeism for employees. How employees treated each other then led to better quality of life, satisfaction, and health outcomes for patients. A culture of companionate love even mediated increased satisfaction for the families of patients. When extended beyond a long-term care setting, and across seven different industries, a culture of companionate love was significantly positively correlated with job satisfaction, commitment to the organization, and accountability for work performance (Barsade & O'Neill, 2014). In research that has yet to be published, but discussed on a podcast episode, Barsade (Crowley, 2020) further highlights that a culture of companionate love from athletic coaches predicts individual and collective athletic performance positively, while a culture of anger and fear doesn't predict it, or has a negative correlation. And according to Barsade (Crowley, 2020), "never has a culture of fear positively correlated with employee accountability" (36:02). Westre (2008) further highlights the importance of love for servant-leader coaches in athletics, particularly in the realm of accountability, as each coach interviewed

"felt that love as a motivational technique, based on sincere caring and compassion, would generate the highest commitment from their athletes" (p. 132). One coach directly spoke to the power of love: "I have learned that motivation through love, sincere love, has the strongest, longest, and most powerful effect on individuals" (p. 128). The true effects, the true power of such love, with servant-leadership as its foundation, are still emerging. For collegiate student-athletes, Hammermeister et al. (2008) show that servant-leadership coaches play a key role in athlete development, mediating athlete satisfaction, intrinsic motivation, task orientation, coping skills, and self-confidence. Rieke et al. (2008) perhaps take this research one step further. Servant-leader high school basketball coaches were found to produce far greater levels of athlete satisfaction, intrinsic motivation, and mental skills than non-servant-leader coaches. And when analyzing performance on the court, Rieke et al. (2008) found that "servant leader coaches win more than their non-servant leader counterparts" (p. 236). For the researchers, this seemed to be an intuitive conclusion. As Rieke et al. (2008) highlight, "the servant leader coaches in this sample possessed many superior coaching skills relative to their non-servant peers" (p. 236). But for men's college basketball coaches in a highly-competitive, win now environment, and embedded in leadership centered and power and control, this conclusion would not be as obvious. Hierarchy-drive, rules-based, and authoritative leadership models prevail. Westre (2008) highlights a professional cost for servant-leader collegiate athletic coaches as "negative labels from other coaches in the profession who either didn't agree with or didn't understand the servant-leadership style" (pp. 129-130). These findings of Rieke et al. (2008), that servant-leader coaches win more than their non-servant-leader peers, are "the first peer-reviewed statistical confirmation of his effect" (p. 236). While further research is still needed in this area, perhaps particularly in collegiate sports, it brings a fuller picture of the

positive impacts of servant-leadership and companionate love more greatly into focus. Just as cultures of inappropriate power result in negative psychological, interpersonal, and performance outcomes, it seems that the opposite is true for cultures of companionate love built upon a foundation of servant-leadership.

CONCLUSION

For men's college basketball coaching, leadership embedded in inappropriate to power can be transformed through an inward journey toward a servant-led response, and sustained through an emotional culture of companionate love. Given this, opportunities for further research are great. These researchers may want to more greatly explore the transformation and development process toward a foundation of servant-leadership for men's college basketball coaches on a larger scale, examine servant-led men's college basketball programs, explore challenges or barriers to servant-leadership in men's college basketball, or perform similar longitudinal studies as Barsade and O'Neill (2014), to explore servant-leadership and companionate love, and specific actions of each as performed by coaches, in men's college basketball contexts. Performance outcomes would be particularly notable here as well. But even with opportunities for future research, it remains that, as hooks (2018) eloquently states, "the practice of loving is the healing force that brings sustained peace. It is the practice of love that transforms" (p. 220). Indeed much is to be healed for the leader embedded in inappropriate power and for those caught in the web of control, coercion, manipulation and power struggles through expressions of contempt. The severe consequences encompass decreased performance over the long-term, decreased self-esteem and leader identity, and irreparable fracture to relationships. For Covey (2002), the attempted uses of such power would be akin to borrowing strength, rather than engaging in more healthy expressions of power that create autonomy and opportunity, build rather

than destroy. How paradoxical that these perceived shows of strength build profound weakness! Perhaps Covey simplifies the weaknesses developed by borrowing strength when he identifies three specific areas: "In self, because we are not developing moral authority; in the other, because they become co-dependent with our use of formal authority; and in the quality of the relationship, because authentic openness and trust are never developed" (p. 12). Continued borrowing strength that weakens self, others and relationships is likely to fall in on itself. Some of the examples of leadership embedded in inappropriate power in men's college basketball coaching provided earlier show the ways this leadership comes crashing down, destroying rather than building. Over time there will be nothing to borrow against. But the practice of love transforms. And hooks (2018) continues to illuminate the path out of the darkness, when she adds the following: "we surrender the will to power…we cannot know love if we remain unable to surrender our attachment to power" (p. 221). Power struggles, having and wanting to have more, and construing others in one's own image, inevitably creates distance in efforts to rise above or diminish those around. As Greenleaf (1977/2002) reflects, "when someone is moved atop a pyramid, that person no longer has colleagues, only subordinates" (p. 76). One can sense the lovelessness at the heart of such a statement. Contempt becomes a companion in distancing efforts, rather than the closeness that accompanies the will to love and cultures of companionate love through actions of care, affection, compassion, and tenderness. Demonstrating sincere care and compassion, building relationships through getting to know student-athletes, and leading through love rather than contempt are perhaps some places to begin for men's college basketball coaches. While powerful first steps, these action steps might lack the requisite depth of meaning that provides the transforming power of love, and positive impacts of servant-leadership and companionate love, such as

increased student-athlete satisfaction, intrinsic motivation, and individual and collective performance. To bring about the closeness at the heart of cultures of companionate love, men's college basketball coaches may do the life work required, and go on a journey of healing and reconciliation through the process of self-reflection and forgiveness-asking to address the harms caused to those around them, chart a different path forward, and making a meaningful change in response to those harms.

For Baylor University's men's basketball program, the practice of love indeed transforms. Nearly 20 years after its program was tormented by lovelessness, it reached the pinnacle of the sport, winning the 2021 NCAA National Championship with a culture of J.O.Y., under head coach Scott Drew. And over the last four seasons, only three student-athletes, an average of only 0.75 per season, and well below the NCAA average of nearly one-third of each program, have transferred from Baylor to another institution ("Transfers," 2022). For Drew and the Baylor basketball program, J.O.Y. represents a priority list to orient one's life: Jesus, Others, Yourself (Cherry, 2021). Through this orientation, one sees the shift toward self-transcendence and meaning fulfillment through being directed toward something other than oneself. Perhaps we also see a desire to shift vision away from the head coach, from the "lone chief atop a pyramid" (Greenleaf, 1977/2002, p. 76), so often credited with success or failure of a program within the context of leadership centered in power and control, and toward a larger vision with the individual regarded as the leader seen in service to the idea (Greenleaf, 1998). Greenleaf (1977/2002) reflects that this lone chief is abnormal and corrupting, citing our human imperfections and the need for mutual trust and feedback of others to be all that we can be, and correct us when blown off course from service to the great dream. And while the everyday actions of the program remain hidden behind closed doors, Drew (Hill, 2021) credits an emotional culture of love and joy for

the program's success: "You can tell there's a genuine love for each other…The love and joy they have for each other is definitely a key to our success" (para. 29). For better or for worse, there is no light without shadow. And the light of servant-leadership and love can illuminate the path out of the darkness for men's college basketball coaches embedded in inappropriate power.

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Adam Gierlach is a leadership coach, a student of servant-leadership, and a former Division-I men's college basketball coach. As a leadership coach, Adam helps leaders to become servant-leaders, and increase the capacity of individuals to lead. He transitioned into leadership coaching after nearly a decade in men's college basketball. He earned his M.A. in Organizational Leadership with a concentration in Servant-Leadership from Gonzaga University, and a B.A. in History from Rice University. Adam is a doctoral student in Gonzaga University's School of Leadership Studies and resides in Spokane, Washington.