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The athletic, academic, and social experiences of female intercollegiate team sport student-athletes

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THE ATHLETIC, ACADEMIC, AND SOCIAL EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE
INTERCOLLEGIATE TEAM SPORT STUDENT-ATHLETES

by

Jason Michael Frank

Bachelor of Science
Central Michigan University
2004

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

**Master of Science Degree in Sport and Leisure Services Management
William F. Harrah College of Hotel Administration**

**Graduate College
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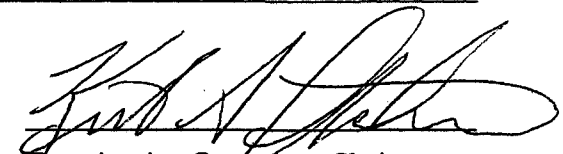
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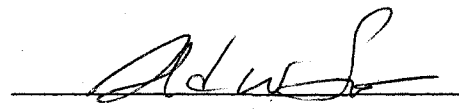
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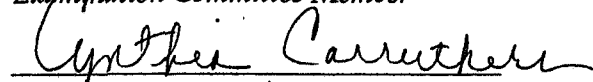
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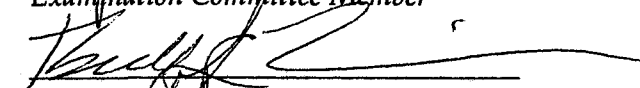
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ABSTRACT

The Athletic, Academic, and Social Experiences of Female Intercollegiate Team Sport Student-Athletes

by

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Intercollegiate athletics at the Division I level in the United States have developed into highly publicized forms of entertainment and business (Hill, Burch-Ragan, & Yates, 2001), while often generating conflicts and dilemmas within universities when the goals of the athletic department clash with the goals of the school (Sperber, 1990; Zimbalist, 1999). In the middle of it all are student-athletes, young adults whose title combines two distinct roles into one. Balancing these roles can be difficult (Adler & Adler, 1987; Adler & Adler, 1990; Miller & Kerr, 2002; Miller & Kerr, 2003), but student-athletes who do balance their roles and view both of them positively are better equipped to adjust to college life (Killeya, 2001).

In addition to the student and athlete roles, student-athletes also desire social interactions and experiences. Miller and Kerr (2002, 2003) suggest that the lives of student-athletes revolve around athletic, academic, and social spheres. The overwhelming majority of existing literature related to student-athletes deals with one or more of these areas.

While Miller and Kerr (2002) studied a variety of male and female, team and individual sport student-athletes at a Canadian university, this paper will replicate their methods and extend them to a more specific population: senior female team sport student-athletes at an American Division I university. The participants in this study also received at least a partial athletic financial aid package, which is one of the major differences between American NCAA Division I athletics and college sports in Canada, where athletic scholarships provide very minimal financial assistance. This paper examined and analyzed the athletic, academic, and social experiences of this more specialized sample of participants—female team sport student-athletes.

This study employed qualitative research methods. Specifically, in-depth interviews with the participants accounted for all of the data collection. Following Miller and Kerr's (2002) methods, this paper sought to contribute to the body of knowledge regarding intercollegiate student-athletes by portraying and investigating the experiences of a specific group of student-athletes: senior female team sport student-athletes who received athletic financial aid. Seven of these individuals were interviewed with regards to their experiences as intercollegiate student-athletes. Their responses add to the existing literature and present professionals in the world of college athletics with a broader picture of the student-athlete experience.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

It's a Saturday morning in October. All across the country diverse groups of people congregate on college campuses, raising their school's flag from the back of tailgates, amidst the smell of grilled food and the sound of marching band music, in eager anticipation of the afternoon or evening's college football game. It's a Thursday afternoon in March. Millions of fans tune into the NCAA men's college basketball tournament, many of whom are skipping school or calling in sick to work so they won't miss the excitement of the opening round. It's any given day throughout the school year. Devoted local fans and parents pay modest admission prices to watch college baseball, wrestling, gymnastics, tennis, track and field, hockey, volleyball, soccer, and a variety of other sports.

College sports are a passion for many Americans. All one has to do is open a newspaper or turn on a television during college football or basketball season to witness the importance that many place on college athletics. Whether arguing about college football's bowl system, filling out basketball tournament brackets in office pools, or displaying their school's logo on their clothing, vehicle, or home, millions of American sports fans demonstrate strong interest in intercollegiate athletics.

As a result of its enormous popularity, college athletics has become a prominent form of entertainment and big business (Hill, Burch-Ragan, & Yates, 2001). Multi-million dollar television contracts, corporate sponsorships, and other sources of revenue have put the missions of universities at odds with the goals of the universities' athletic departments (Sperber, 1990; Zimbalist, 1999). In the middle of these conflicts are the performers that fans pay to watch and root for—the student-athletes, most of whom are between the ages of eighteen and twenty-three. While the most visible and celebrated among them typically compete in the revenue (though not necessarily profit) sports of football and men's basketball, all intercollegiate student-athletes, especially at the Division I level, are affected, in some way, by the business of college sports.

While conflicting missions exist between schools and their athletic departments, conflict may also reside within student-athletes themselves (Adler & Adler, 1987; Miller & Kerr, 2002; Giacobbi, Lynn, Wetherington, Jenkins, Bodendorf, & Langley, 2004). As their hyphenated title suggests, these young people must struggle to balance their athletic and academic roles and identities. In addition, as students who are enjoying what is often a new sense of freedom in college, student-athletes also juggle social lives (Adler & Adler, 1987, Miller & Kerr, 2002).

College sports provide entertainment to millions of sports fans, from the fall football tailgaters to the parents of spring softball players. The individuals providing this entertainment, though, are also young adults who take biology exams, attend parties at student apartments, and cope with being away from home for the first time in their lives. Their pictures may be seen on the front page of *USA Today*, or they may only appear on page 56 of the team's media guide. Classmates may ask some student-athletes for

autographs, while other student-athletes may compete in relative obscurity. Student-athletes are a diverse group of people, and their stories and experiences are important for university personnel—especially those in the athletic department—to understand.

Academic advisors and other professionals who assist student-athletes should not only be aware of student-athletes' experiences, but also the student-athletes' perceptions of those experiences. This understanding helps advisors, coaches, and other members of the athletic department effectively assist and relate to the student-athletes with whom they work. This study examined the participants' perspectives of their experiences as intercollegiate student-athletes. The information obtained through this study will help athletic department staff members prepare themselves for assisting student-athletes with the variety of challenges they face.

The experiences of intercollegiate student-athletes have been the focus of a number of qualitative studies (Adler & Adler, 1987, 1991; Meyer, 1990; Riemer, Beal, & Schroeder, 2000; Miller & Kerr, 2002, 2003; Giacobbi et al., 2004). This literature typically provides insights into student-athletes' athletic, academic, and social experiences and challenges. However, intercollegiate athletic departments may provide unique environments and resources that influence the student-athletes' experiences. In addition, schools may support and maintain a variety of different sports, which brings diverse groups of student-athletes to individual campuses. With this in mind, it is important to understand and learn more about the student-athlete experience from different groups of student-athletes, since a wide array of variables influence the experiences of each individual student-athlete.

Purpose of the Study

This study will replicate and extend Miller and Kerr's (2002) research on Canadian student-athletes. The purposes of their study were to identify the main components of the student-athletes' lives, consider the relationship between those components, and examine how those components developed over the course of the student-athletes' college careers. I extended their study in the following ways: First, my study took place in the United States, where universities award athletic scholarships and intercollegiate athletics receive much more media coverage and national interest than in Canada (Miller & Kerr, 2002, 2003). A second extension involved narrowing the participants to female team sport student-athletes who were in their senior year at the school. Miller and Kerr also focused on senior year student-athletes, but they used a mix of male and female participants and team and individual sport athletes. A third and final extension limited the participants to student-athletes attending school on at least 50% athletic financial aid. In Canada, student-athletes can only receive very limited athletic aid (Miller & Kerr, 2002; Lally, 2007). These extensions will contribute to the literature by taking an existing study and applying it to a different population—senior female team sport student-athletes receiving athletic financial aid at an American Division I university.

Student-athletes come from various backgrounds. Their collegiate experiences differ according to many factors, including gender, race, type of university, and sport (Adler & Adler, 1987, 1991; Meyer, 1990; Riemer, Beal, & Schroeder, 2000; Miller & Kerr, 2002, 2003; Giacobbi et al., 2004). Research on student-athletes is complex, and it is impossible to generalize from a limited sample to all student-athletes, especially in qualitative studies. The experiences of an African-American scholarship track and field

athlete at a Division I school in the southwest may be much different from the experiences of a non-scholarship Caucasian football player at a Division III college in the northeast.

I used a qualitative methodology in order to replicate Miller and Kerr's (2002) work. Qualitative methods also provide the lens through which the participants' subjective perspectives (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) can be highlighted. In order to understand the student-athletes' experiences, it is important to include their own words and perspectives, which demonstrates authenticity and the presence of interpretive rigor (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002). Qualitative methods are optimal for gaining more knowledge on the subject of intercollegiate student-athlete experiences.

Research Questions

The research questions that will guide this study are "What are the current and past academic, athletic, and social experiences of senior female scholarship team sport student-athletes at a large, urban Division I university," "How do these student-athletes balance these three aspects of their lives," and "How do these student-athletes define and construct their identities?"

Significance of the Study

This study sought to gain a greater understanding of the intercollegiate student-athlete experience, using open-ended interviews with senior student-athletes. In replicating Miller and Kerr's (2002) methods and extending them to a more specific student-athlete population—senior female team sport student-athletes receiving athletic financial aid at an American Division I university—more detailed insights can be gained through the description of student-athletes' lived experiences. The study will provide

greater depth to the existing body of knowledge concerning intercollegiate student-athletes by focusing on a specific subset of student-athletes. It addressed a lack of recent qualitative research that focuses on women's team sports—especially softball and soccer, two of the sports represented in this study. This study attempted to fill that gap in the literature.

Definition

Throughout this paper, the term “Division I” will be used to describe the level of competition at which the participants in this study compete. NCAA member institutions that are classified as Division I must sponsor at least fourteen varsity sports, at least half of which must be women's sports. Division II and III schools, in contrast, are required to support fewer sports and allow limited (Division II) or no (Division III) athletic scholarships, compared to Division I schools (“What's the difference,” 2007).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Considering the popularity of intercollegiate athletics, it is not surprising that a number of academic studies have been conducted with college athletes. The existing literature on the experiences of intercollegiate student-athletes tends to focus on athletic, academic, and social issues (Adler & Adler, 1987, 1991; Meyer, 1990; Riemer, Beal, & Schroeder, 2000; Miller & Kerr, 2002, 2003; Giacobbi et al., 2004). Within the literature, the impact of socializing influences such as teammates and coaches has been analyzed (Adler & Adler, 1987, 1991; Meyer, 1990; Giacobbi et al., 2004). In addition, gender differences in the student-athlete experience have been studied through a variety of different lenses (Meyer, 1990; Veri, 1999; Riemer, Beal, & Schroeder, 2000; Person, Benson-Quaziena, & Rogers, 2001; Miller & Kerr, 2002, 2003). Identity conflict, where student-athletes may over- or under-identify with one of their roles, has also been an interesting topic for researchers (Adler & Adler, 1987, 1991; Killeya, 2001; Miller & Kerr, 2002, 2003; Killeya-Jones, 2005).

Athlete versus student identity

Athletic identity is defined as “the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role” (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993). Over-identification with the athlete role has been referred to as a “jock” mentality, which has negative connotations

(Miller, Melnick, Barnes, Farrell, & Sabo, 2005). Student-athletes may also identify with the student role, with a positive outlook on academics. Student identity refers to an individual's attitude and level of identification with the student role.

Ryska (2002) studied high school athletes and discovered that the quality of a student's sports experiences, combined with his or her goal orientations, generally relate to the level of the student's competence perceptions in the classroom and other non-athletic endeavors. A combination of high ego orientation and high athletic identity predicted lower achievement academically, while task orientation and moderate athletic identity predicted greater academic success and perceived competence (Ryska, 2003). A study of six hundred adolescents from New York showed that the academic outcomes of athletes were dependent on factors such as race, gender, type of activity, and whether the adolescents viewed themselves as "jocks," with a sense of almost exclusive athletic identity (Miller, Melnick, Barnes, Farrell, & Sabo, 2005).

At the college level, student-athletes who are most successful at balancing their multiple responsibilities tend to be those who have a compatible and unified sense of both athletic identity and student identity (Killeya, 2001; Killeya-Jones, 2005). While athletic identity is important for nearly all collegiate student-athletes (Killeya, 2001), a positive task value on scholastic achievement is more related to convergence of both identities (Killeya-Jones, 2005). Academic competence and satisfaction were considerably higher in football players who exhibited balanced student and athlete roles (Killeya-Jones, 2005). The balanced roles were also associated with more positive overall well-being, and Killeya (2001) found this balance as a key component of adjustment to college life. Therefore, academic advisors and counselors need to reinforce the value of embracing the

student identity (Killeya, 2001; Harrison & Lawrence, 2003), especially since a lack of harmony between the athlete and student roles minimizes overall well-being and satisfaction (Killeya-Jones, 2005). In addition, advisors and counselors must recognize the threat of stereotypes against African-American student-athletes and other minorities, who may be anxious about academic performance in college and, therefore, more accepting of the athlete role (Killeya, 2001).

As a result of over-identification with the athlete role, men in revenue sports (basketball and football) may be shutting off important academic opportunities, which may lead to immature career goals (Murphy, Petitpas, & Brewer, 1996). The men's basketball players in Adler and Adler's study (1987, 1991) changed, reduced, or eliminated their student roles when conflict between school and basketball emerged. This alteration of the student role may also have been impacted by a fear that serious studying and career planning could be viewed as a sign that professional sports career options may not be realistic (Murphy, Petitpas, & Brewer, 1996).

As student-athletes mature and recognize that their talents will not likely lift them to professional status in their sport, they may tend to focus more on their academic or student identity (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993; Miller & Kerr, 2002, 2003; Riemer, Beal, & Schroeder, 2000). While some student-athletes may begin college with an almost exclusive athletic identity, their evolving maturity and interaction in different college activities leads to a decrease in the athletic role by the end of their careers (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993). This is consistent with the findings of Miller and Kerr (2002, 2003), who saw shifts from an athletic focus to an academic focus in their subjects from a Canadian university. Some of the student-athletes in the 2003 study discussed how, as

they become upperclassmen, they began to place more importance on schoolwork and meeting and socializing with students who were not athletes. In addition, one student-athlete mentioned that maturing and becoming comfortable with oneself diminishes the importance of athletic identity to one's confidence. It is important to keep in mind, though, that Miller and Kerr's work took place in Canada, where different dynamics exist within the structure of intercollegiate athletics.

Miller and Kerr (2003) identified and explained three periods (Early, Mid, and Late) and two stages (Over-identification with the athlete role and Deferred role experimentation) in the college careers of the student-athletes they studied. In the early period, the student-athletes over-identified with the athlete role, which cost them in the classroom. The mid-period saw more balance between the roles, with academics gaining ground on the athletic emphasis. Finally, the late period was characterized by a shifting focus where academics became a higher commitment. As the student-athletes matured, the importance of their athletic identities decreased, while their student identities increased. Again, a major limitation of the study is that it was conducted with student-athletes in Canada, where athletic scholarships and revenue generated by college sports are not at the same level as in the United States.

The team culture (Adler & Adler, 1987, 1991; Meyer, 1990; Riemer, Beal, & Schroeder, 2000), the presence or lack of professional sports opportunities (Adler & Adler, 1987, 1991; Meyer, 1990; Riemer, Beal, & Schroeder, 2000), and the threat of negative stereotypes (Meyer, 1990; Veri, 1999) also influence an individual student-athlete's self-identity. Whether student-athletes identify more strongly with the athlete or student role may depend on these factors. The impact of social isolation, team culture,

professional opportunities, and stereotype threat on student-athlete identity will be explored within the following sections.

Academic Challenges

Student-athletes who are able to balance their student identities with their athlete identities generally attain more overall success in college, are more satisfied with their lives, and experience positive well-being (Killeya-Jones, 2005). It is important to balance the roles of student and athlete, in order to minimize excess complications that can result from overemphasizing one role over the other (Miller & Kerr, 2003). Even student-athletes who demonstrate balanced identities are challenged academically, though, by time constraints resulting from their sports participation (Adler & Adler, 1987, 1991; Meyer, 1990; Riemer, Beal, & Schroeder, 2000; Miller & Kerr, 2002, 2003; Giacobbi et al. 2004), by the difficulty of college-level classes (Adler & Adler, 1987, 1991; Miller & Kerr, 2002; Miller & Kerr, 2003), and by graduation and career goals (Meyer, 1990; Riemer, Beal, & Schroeder, 2000).

Finding the time to work on their academics is a major challenge to student-athletes, especially those who are new to the demands of college (Adler & Adler, 1987, 1991; Miller & Kerr, 2002; Miller & Kerr, 2003; Giacobbi et al., 2004). Student-athletes at one Canadian university displayed poor beginnings to their academic careers, before eventually accepting and embracing their academic roles later in their college careers (Miller & Kerr, 2002, 2003). The physical exhaustion from practice and games often left first year student-athletes without much energy to do homework, and that led to lower grades and, in some cases, failed classes (Miller & Kerr, 2003). In addition, these student-athletes over-identified with their athlete role at the outset of their college careers,

which resulted in skipped classes and poorer grades than the student-athletes achieved in high school. These student-athletes were able to atone for their poor start, though, by changing their focus from sports goals to school goals by their final years in college. This was partly due to the fact that a number of them changed their majors during their second year to subjects with which they were more comfortable, competent, and interested (Miller & Kerr, 2002, 2003).

Balancing school with athletic demands was also cited as a source of academic stress by freshmen female swimmers (Giacobbi et al., 2004). Some of this stress was related to the pressures associated with the intensity and high expectations of their athletic commitments. In a similar way, the men's basketball players in Adler and Adler's (1987, 1991) study were overwhelmed by the task of balancing academic and athletic priorities. The women's swimmers, though, were more successful in coping with their academic stresses, primarily as a result of positive influences and a pro-intellectual team climate, which was not evident with the men's basketball players. Adler and Adler (1987, 1991) found that the men's basketball players discouraged each other from doing well scholastically, and that the coaches built up basketball as the top priority. These factors contributed to a disassociation with the student role among some members of the team.

The Division I women's basketball and volleyball players who participated in Meyer's (1990) study felt that too much time was required for practice and other athletic obligations. This initially caused the women to struggle when trying to balance their athletics and academics. However, some of the student-athletes credited their athletic requirements with teaching them how to effectively budget their time, which, near the end of their college careers, helped them achieve more academic success.

This was also indicated by student-athletes in a study by Kimball and Freysinger (2003). These student-athletes claimed that the stresses and challenges of collegiate sport participation compelled them to increase their academic goals. By attempting to recreate the pressure and competition of athletics through grade attainment and class performance, these student-athletes were able to transfer feelings of athletic competence to academic competence (Kimball & Freysinger, 2003). While this information comes from a small sample size of just a few student-athletes, it suggests that athletic involvement has the potential to drive athletes to success in other areas, namely academics. Athletic challenges, for the athletes quoted in Kimball and Freysinger's article, were springboards to tackling academic challenges, which, in turn, increased feelings of academic competence.

The women's teams in Meyer's (1990) study had academic orientations, as did the women's basketball and tennis teams studied by Riemer, Beal, and Schroeder (2000). The men's basketball team did not have a strong academic orientation, and as a result, their individual academic challenges increased to a level where many of the players significantly reduced their initial collegiate academic goals (Adler & Adler, 1987, 1991). Having a strong academic outlook and student identity, then, is essential to surviving the early frustrations that most student-athletes have with balancing academic and athletic commitments (Killeya, 2001; Meyer, 1990).

For many student-athletes, the freshman year can be an eye-opening experience that produces an adjustment, in terms of how they view their academic abilities (Adler & Adler, 1987, 1991). It also alerts them to the type of commitment it takes to be successful academically in college (Miller & Kerr, 2002, 2003). Most of the basketball players in

Adler and Adler's (1987, 1991) research entered college with a strong sense of their academic ability. However, after discovering how difficult and challenging college level classes were, in addition to the mandatory time reserved for basketball, that sense of academic competence diminished. The Canadian student-athletes learned after their first year in college that they would have to focus more of their attention on school responsibilities if they wanted to perform as well academically as they did in high school (Miller & Kerr, 2003).

Faculty members who prejudge student-athletes and their academic and intellectual abilities represent another challenge for these student-athletes. The men's basketball players in the Adler and Adler (1987) study suggested that some of their professors did not respect their academic capabilities and treated them as inferior students. These types of perceptions can be damaging to a student-athlete's feeling of academic competence, acceptance, and identification with the student role. Some of these faculty prejudices may be more prevalent with male student-athletes, particularly those who participate in revenue-producing sports, since the academic performances of many of these student-athletes has been historically mediocre (Brede & Camp, 1987). Some prejudices against student-athletes may even exist even at the Division II level (Baucom & Lantz, 2001).

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has implemented new rules that require student-athletes at all member institutions to remain on track for graduating and earning a degree (Holsendolph, 2006). These regulations ensure that student-athletes are constantly making progress towards a degree and not just taking enough credits to

stay eligible. With these new rules in place, it is more critical than ever for student-athletes to pass their courses.

It is also important for student-athletes to possess mature career goals (Riemer, Beal, & Schroeder, 2000; Brown & Hartley, 1998; Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993). For most of the women's basketball and women's tennis players studied by Riemer, Beal, and Schroeder (2000), professional sports careers were not realistic. The female athletes were cognizant of the limited professional opportunities. Perhaps, as a result, these student-athletes focused more on academic work, similar to the Canadian student-athletes (Miller & Kerr, 2002, 2003), who developed a stronger student identity as their careers progressed and their professional sports aspirations faded.

While these female and Canadian student-athletes displayed career maturity and a realistic view of their post-collegiate athletic options, the same may not necessarily be true for male athletes in the United States, particularly those in revenue sports. Some of these student-athletes may fear that taking school seriously and planning for a career in something other than their sport could be viewed as a sign that a career in professional sports may not be realistic (Murphy, Petitpas, & Brewer, 1996). Although this view could act as a barrier to academic effort, Brown and Hartley (1998) found that four out of five male football and basketball players at a sample of five Division I and Division II schools were seriously working towards a career in a field other than professional sports. The small sample size and inclusion of Division II athletes are severe limitations to that study, though, since the results may not be representative of the overall, student-athlete population.

It is difficult for many student-athletes to balance athletic and academic priorities. While it has been found that factors not related to athletics, such as degree program options and type of community, are perceived to be just as important to student-athletes when selecting a university (Letawsky, Schneider, Pederson & Palmer, 2003), the athletic demands often take precedence for new student-athletes. NCAA President Myles Brand suggests that academic credit should soon be awarded to student-athletes, as he compared the cognitive effects of intercollegiate athletic participation to the positive cognitive growth experienced by students who major in music (Brand, 2006). At least one Division I university began offering academic courses geared towards student-athletes, providing instruction in the cognitive and psychological aspects of competition and collegiate sports participation (Curry & Maniar, 2004). As universities analyze the role of the student-athlete, sports involvement may soon become a more integral part of the scholastic endeavors of student-athletes.

Feelings of academic competence may be tied to whether or not the sport produces revenue. While it is an older study, Brede and Camp (1987) examined student-athletes' academic performance at a Division I program during the 1982-83 school year. The student-athletes on the football and men's basketball teams (representing the typical "revenue" sports) within the study displayed weak-to-mediocre academic performances. Roughly 20% were passing easily, 55% were just getting by, and 25% were struggling to stay eligible. This means that four out of every five football and men's basketball players at this school were not experiencing significant academic achievement. This data would also suggest that perceived academic competence among those student-athletes was low, and their adherence to the athletic identity was high. Perhaps coaches from revenue sports,

more so than other sports, feel the need to recruit more sub-par students who cling to the “jock” identity (Miller, Melnick, Barnes, Farrell, & Sabo, 2005), in order to achieve athletic success.

Athletic Challenges

College athletics continues to grow into a major form of entertainment and business (Hill, Burch-Ragan, & Yates, 2001). With that comes pressure on athletic departments and coaches to win and be successful on the field or court (Sperber, 1991; Zimbalist, 1999). This pressure can also be applied to student-athletes. High expectations of coaches force many student-athletes to focus a considerable amount of their time and energy on performance in athletics (Giacobbi et al., 2004; Adler & Adler, 1987, 1991). For the men’s basketball players in Adler and Adler’s research (1987, 1991), the attention paid to basketball responsibilities caused many of them to reduce or drop their academic responsibilities. For the women’s swimmers, the lofty expectations and intense pressure to succeed in their sport was a major source of stress and anxiety (Giacobbi et al., 2004).

Coaches may also assign harsher penalties for missing or being late to a practice or conditioning session than they would for a student-athlete missing a class, which further enhances the notion that athletic success is of vital importance (Kimball & Freysinger, 2003). While the NCAA places limits on the amount of time coaches can require athletes to practice, condition, or prepare for their sport, numerous coaches work around those limitations by offering “voluntary” workouts, which most student-athletes view as mandatory, in order to remain in good standing with the coaches and earn playing time (Fletcher, Benshoff, & Richburg, 2003). These factors cause stress and put pressure on the student-athletes to devote tremendous amounts of energy to their athletic pursuits,

which may, in turn, cause their academic work to suffer (Adler & Adler, 1987; Fletcher, Benshoff, & Richburg, 2003). As a result, student-athletes may begin to over-identify with their athlete role, which can be harmful to their overall development (Hill, Burch-Ragan, & Yates, 2001).

In addition to pressure from coaches, one student-athlete quoted by Miller and Kerr (2003) indicated that pressure to compete with upperclassmen was intimidating, especially since he didn't feel welcomed by the older team members. Incoming student-athletes may have to cope with lesser roles on the team than they had in high school, which can cause additional stress (Giacobbi et al., 2004; Miller & Kerr, 2002).

Some student-athletes view their involvement in intercollegiate athletics as more of a job than a leisure activity (Adler & Adler, 1987, 1991; Meyer, 1990; Riemer, Beal, & Schroeder, 2000). Pressure from the coaches and the intense time demands decreased the fun of playing for the men's basketball players in Adler and Adler's research (1987). The female athletes studied by Meyer (1990) felt that their sports involvement ruled their lives. These women also pointed out that pressure from coaches and the more difficult competition also helped create the job-like feeling.

The female student-athletes studied by Riemer, Beal, and Schroeder (2000) also spoke of the perception that their collegiate sports experiences were more like jobs, due to the time commitments, expectations of success, and intensity of the competition. Some of the women's basketball players in the study viewed their situation as an exchange of services, where their basketball participation was compensated with scholarships, which increased the pressure associated with athletic performance. While participation in high school sports was perceived to be more fun and enjoyable, intercollegiate athletics

generally provided less joy and more of a work-type atmosphere (Adler & Adler, 1987, 1991; Meyer, 1990; Riemer, Beal, & Schroeder, 2000).

The job-like characteristics of participation in intercollegiate athletics provide mental and physical challenges for student-athletes who make the transition from high school to college (Adler & Adler, 1987, 1991; Meyer, 1990; Riemer, Beal, & Schroeder, 2000; Miller & Kerr, 2002, 2003). Student-athletes may enter college with hopes of professional sports careers, but for the overwhelming majority of student-athletes, these hopes do not turn into reality. For the women's tennis players at one of the universities in Riemer, Beal, and Schroeder's (2000) study, it was difficult to come to terms with the fact that they were not going to advance to the professional level and that their competitive careers would likely be over after college. On the other hand, the women's tennis players at the study's other university had lower aspirations regarding a professional career, and they were able to better cope with their college years being the end of their competitive tennis lives. The student-athletes studied by Miller and Kerr (2002, 2003) also had to face the end of their sports careers during college, which forced them to readjust their priorities and the value they placed on academics.

Female athletes generally have fewer professional career opportunities than men, and that may account for some female athletes being able to balance their responsibilities and identify with the student role in a more positive manner (Riemer, Beal, & Schroeder, 2000; Meyer, 1990). In addition, the lack of social status and recognition that female athletes receive on campus may hinder athletic identity, which in turn, helps them concentrate on both academics and athletics (Meyer, 1990). Many female student-athletes view their college sports participation as a job, where their efforts are compensated with

the scholarship and free education (Riemer, Beal, & Schroeder, 2000; Meyer, 1990). One of the student-athletes in Meyer's study said that staying academically eligible was a big part of that job, which also increased identification with the student role.

One sport in which more professional opportunities have opened up since Meyer's article in 1990 is women's basketball. Six out of the nineteen women's basketball players in Riemer, Beal, and Schroeder's 2000 study mentioned a desire to play in either the ABL or WNBA, women's professional leagues that did not exist in 1990. Unlike the women's tennis players in the same study, who were interested in careers not related to tennis, the basketball players claimed they were using their college basketball experience as a springboard for careers in coaching. Based on this information, it may be possible that women's basketball players are identifying more with the athlete role than in the past. This should be an area of future research.

Social Challenges

While the academic and athletic challenges faced by college student-athletes create stress and anxiety, a number of stressful social challenges exist, including social isolation (Adler & Adler, 1987, 1991; Meyer, 1990; Riemer, Beal & Schroeder, 2000; Miller & Kerr, 2002, 2003), negative stereotypes (Meyer, 1990; Veri, 1999), pressures to drink alcohol (Martens, Watson & Beck, 2006; Hill, Burch-Ragan, & Yates, 2001), and problems adjusting to life away from family and friends (Giacobbi, et al., 2004).

Student-athletes often have to deal with being socially isolated from the rest of the university's student body. This is often the case at the start of their college experiences, when they usually live together in the same residence halls (Riemer, Beal & Schroeder, 2000; Adler & Adler, 1987, 1991) and rely on each other's shared challenges to set the

tone for positive social support (Giacobbi et al., 2004). Many student-athletes have much less interaction with non-athletes than athletes, and they often develop fewer non-athlete friendships (Meyer, 1990; Adler & Adler, 1987, 1991; Miller & Kerr, 2002, 2003). While some student-athletes may eventually seek out non-athlete friends near the end of their careers (Meyer, 1990; Miller & Kerr, 2003), the social isolation often continues throughout college, and the majority of student-athletes maintain friendships almost exclusively with other student-athletes (Adler & Adler, 1987, 1991; Miller & Kerr, 2002).

Social isolation, the state in which student-athletes are essentially void of contact with people outside of their team or athletic department, may also play a role in determining a collegiate student-athlete's identity. In some cases, as with Adler and Adler's men's basketball program, the social isolation can have a seriously negative effect on student-athletes embracing the student role. In other cases, student-athletes who are around pro-intellectual team environments (Meyer, 1990; Riemer, Beal & Schroeder, 2000) or who relate well with teammates experiencing similar frustrations (Giacobbi et al., 2004) may discover that the social isolation can be a source of positive influence and support. Either way, student-athletes should be encouraged to participate in other activities around campus, in order to develop into more complete students (Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001) and have a more well-rounded college experience.

Many female student-athletes struggle socially with negative stereotypes (Meyer, 1990; Veri, 1999). Perceptions that female athletes are homosexual, masculine, and unattractive may discourage some female athletes from celebrating their athletic identity and accomplishments (Veri, 1999). By not complying with society's expectations of femininity, female athletes are at risk of being labeled as deviant and homosexual (Veri,

1999). Some of the student-athletes in Meyer's study indicated that they would go out of their way to look feminine when they were not competing or at practice, in order to dispel any notion that they were lesbians. Many of the women also said that they wanted to be wives and mothers. This may have been an overemphasized point on their part, as a result of a belief that being heterosexual proved that their sport participation did not make them masculine or turn them into lesbians (Meyer, 1990). Efforts have been made by female student-athletes to hide their athleticism and go out of their way to dress and look like an obviously heterosexual girl (Veri). While women have recently gained more success in the field of sports, a typically male-dominated part of American culture, a perception still exists that stigmatizes these women, who may be viewed as too masculine and not as attractive as females who do not compete in sports (Veri). These stereotypes may still discourage female athletes, even student-athletes in college, from embracing the athlete identity, in fear of having to deal with these perceptions and beliefs.

Intercollegiate student-athletes may also be at risk for a high level of alcohol use (Hill, Burch-Ragan, & Yates, 2001). Martens, Watson, and Beck (2006) found that men's and women's swimming and diving teams were most at-risk for taking part in alcohol consumption. Some reasons that these team members, as well as other collegiate student-athletes, may drink heavily include the team's cultural norms, the idea that alcohol can easily be worked off through intense exercise, and the perception that, due to student-athletes' tight and demanding schedules, any opportunity to party and consume alcohol should not be allowed to pass (Martens, Watson, & Beck, 2006). The study found that athletes from "across all sports shared similar risk levels for experiencing negative

alcohol-related consequences” (p. 148) and that, other than the sports of swimming and diving, there were no significant differences in alcohol use among sports.

Another social challenge experienced by student-athletes, especially those in their freshmen year, is the difficulty of being away from their hometown, their family, and their friends (Giacobbi et al., 2004). Starting over with new friends and the overall transition to college were described by one of the participants in this study of freshmen female swimmers as factors that nearly led to her dropping out of school and going back home. The swimmers cited this transition period from the comforts of home to the unknowns of college as being stressful. Through encouraging and positive contact with family members and teammates, they were able to eventually cope with and flourish in their new surroundings. This is consistent with the results of a previous quantitative study that discovered females require higher levels of emotional and social support (Crocker & Graham, 1995).

Social support and influence come from a variety of people, known as socializers. Socializers are people, such as parents, friends, coaches, and teachers, who are around young individuals and assist them in interpreting and understanding their experiences in different activities (Eccles & Harold, 1991). These people can have a significant impact, positive or negative, on how youngsters view their level of achievement. This idea holds true in some of the research on intercollegiate student-athletes.

Research on women’s basketball teams (Meyer, 1990; Riemer, Beal & Schroeder, 2000), volleyball teams (Meyer, 1990), and women’s tennis teams (Riemer, Beal & Schroeder, 2000) has shown that teammates can be good socializing influences on each other when it comes to academics. Female freshmen swimmers have also cited

teammates' support as being a crucial element in coping with school and sports-related stress (Giacobbi et al., 2004).

In Meyer's (1990) study of a women's basketball and a women's volleyball team, she discovered that an academic atmosphere existed, especially on the volleyball team, that encouraged studying and devotion to schoolwork. The student-athletes pushed each other to succeed in the classroom and ensure that the team grade-point average stayed at a certain level. All of the women's basketball and women's tennis teams studied by Riemer, Beal, and Schroeder (2000) also demonstrated an encouraging, academic focus, where the peer cultures, and in at least one case, the university support staff, contributed to a strong academic environment for the student-athletes.

In contrast, Adler and Adler (1987, 1991) found, in a similar study of a men's basketball team, that teammates discouraged each other from doing well academically. While many of the student-athletes on the team entered college with a positive academic outlook, the challenging classes, coupled with the large amount of time set aside for basketball, came as a surprise and left many of the players with a more negative attitude towards schoolwork. This negative attitude from many of the players fostered an anti-intellectual environment, where players were teased for studying or receiving good grades. Since, as a result of their basketball commitments and living arrangements, they were often socially isolated from many non-athletes and the academic culture of the university, the athletes were not exposed to as many of the intellectual facets of the university.

While the social isolation on the men's basketball team in the Adler and Adler (1987, 1991) study may have had a negative effect on the student-athletes' academic

pursuits, both Meyer (1990) and Reimer, Beal, and Schroeder (2000) suggest that the academic commitment of the team members they studied occurred despite isolation from the rest of the student body. This social isolation has the ability to act as a barrier to academic achievement, since the majority of the social contact that student-athletes have is with other team members and university athletes. The impact of social isolation on scholastic achievement may be a function of gender, since women's sport culture tends to be more pro-academic than male sports culture (Reimer, Beal & Schroeder, 2000). Perhaps this accounts for the difference in academic attitudes between the teams in these studies.

Another example of social isolation occurred with a women's swim team (Giacobbi et al., 2004). In this group, the team members, including five true freshmen who were the focus of the study, relied on each other to cope with stressful academic and athletic situations. Advice from teammates, along with emotional releases like humorous interactions and venting to each other about their stresses, were credited with making the swimmers' first year in college more manageable and enjoyable, academically, athletically, and socially.

The entire athletic subculture for both males and females at a Canadian university was deemed to be intellectually and academically oriented, which created a positive, scholastically motivated climate (Miller & Kerr, 2002). While the student-athletes in this study grew to embrace their student identity more as their college years progressed, the culture at this school was such that athletes who were upperclassmen tended to take school seriously, which could have had a positive influence on younger teammates.

Teammates, then, can have a positive or negative influence on a student-athlete's attitude and approach to academics.

University faculty can also impact a student-athlete's perceptions about academic work. The men's basketball players in the Adler and Adler (1987, 1991) study suggested that their professors treated them differently, looking down on them as students, and thus, discouraging a positive academic outlook. These student-athletes perceived that various professors didn't believe in their cognitive and scholastic capabilities, and that perception may have contributed to their disassociation with the student role. Male athletes at the Division II level may face a similar sort of prejudice, as well, based on a study of faculty at a highly selective Division II university (Baucom & Lantz, 2001). While this study focused more on perceptions and beliefs of faculty members, it is possible that some of these instructors may transfer these beliefs and prejudices into overt actions.

As suggested by the male athletes in the Adler and Adler (1987, 1991) study, this faculty ideology may lead to decreased levels of perceived academic competence and avoidance of the student role. Future research on faculty attitudes and actions towards student-athletes in every sport, at every level (Divisions I, II, III, NAIA, junior college), and with both genders, should be conducted to obtain a better understanding of the consequences of faculty behaviors on student-athletes' academic competence and identification with the student role. Additional research could also explore the influence of non-athlete students on student-athletes, since current research suggests that non-athletes generally do not view athletes positively academically (Knapp, Rasmussen, & Barnhart, 2001).

In addition to the perceived faculty prejudice, the players in the Adler and Adler (1987, 1991) study indicated that their coaches often took care of choosing the players' class schedules and majors. Coaches often dealt with faculty members regarding eligibility issues, rather than making the players themselves accountable for those responsibilities. In contrast, Meyer (1990) learned that the women athletes in her study did not perceive any better or worse treatment by their instructors than non-athletes, and they generally enjoyed their classes and degree programs. It is possible that the difference in treatment by the faculty may be because there are more negative stereotypes regarding male, revenue sport athletes' intellectual capabilities than there are with female athletes. The difference in class satisfaction may be due to the greater autonomy (and possibly a greater degree of intrinsic motivation, as a result) the female athletes had in choosing their classes.

Parents can also still have an impact on their college-age children. The freshmen female swimmers credited nightly phone calls, frequent letters, and weekend visits by parents as overwhelmingly positive support that helped them cope with the stress of life as a collegiate student-athlete (Giacobbi et al., 2004). However, several female athletes in Meyer's (1990) study indicated that their parents provided a greater deal of positive reinforcement for their athletic endeavors, which may inhibit some student-athletes from embracing the student role. Still, most of the women in Meyer's study claimed that their parents did encourage their academic efforts, sometimes to an even greater degree than their exploits on the court. More research should be done to investigate the role of parents on male student-athletes' academic outlooks.

Teammates, faculty, coaches, and parents are all socializers who have tremendous influence on how student-athletes approach their roles as students and as athletes. They can positively assist student-athletes with emotional, esteem, informational, and tangible support (Rees & Hardy, 2000). Emotional support can include help with the pressures of being a student-athlete, future goals, and help with injuries. Esteem support can include helping student-athletes cope with nerves, doubts, and slumps. Informational support can include help with confidence issues, poor performances, and interpersonal problems. Tangible support can include help with injuries and alleviating extra worries (Rees & Hardy, 2000).

Gender differences exist among intercollegiate student-athletes, especially in the social sphere. Differences in stereotypes, coping with stress, athletic identity, perceived academic competence, and the influence of socializers have been demonstrated in previous research. Female student-athletes must not only face negative stereotypes (Veri, 1999; Kimball & Freysinger, 2003), but they also may choose to view their athlete role less seriously, due to possible gender discrimination within athletic departments, in terms of inferior funding, facilities, and media exposure (Fletcher, Benshoff, & Richburg, 2003). Female athletes possess many characteristics associated with eating disorders, have a greater chance of sustaining sports-related injuries, and are at risk for sexual harassment and stalking by fans, as well as hostility and harassment in weight rooms (Person, Benson-Quaziena, & Rogers, 2001). Female student-athletes may also experience more depression and anxiety than male athletes (Storch, Storch, Killiany, & Roberti, 2005). These factors may account for the results of a questionnaire administered to 169 student-athletes at a southeastern university that indicate female athletes perceive more conflict in

their college athletic and academic experiences than male athletes (Lance, 2004). This is surprising, given the previous research.

Male student-athletes also have unique challenges. Based on negative perceptions about student-athletes' cognitive and academic abilities, faculty may be prejudiced, especially about athletes who participate in revenue sports (Adler & Adler, 1987, 1991; Baucom & Lantz, 2001). The pressure to perform athletically is generally greater, as well, due to the greater amount of media exposure and public interest in men's sports (Meyer, 1990).

Conclusion

The experiences of intercollegiate student-athletes have been studied from a variety of perspectives. Adler and Adler's (1987, 1991) qualitative research on the academic and athletic roles and identities of a men's basketball team was extended to women's basketball and volleyball teams by Meyer (1990). Giacobbi, Lynn, Wetherington, Jenkins, Bodendorf, and Langley (2004) studied freshmen female swim team members in order to develop a grounded theory related to student-athletes coping with stress and transitioning to university life. Riemer, Beal, and Schroeder (2000) researched women's tennis and women's basketball teams, focusing on the student-athletes' perceptions of issues such as social isolation, professional sports opportunities, and the end of their athletic careers. Killea-Jones (2005) used a quantitative approach to examine male student-athletes and their self-identity and psychological adjustment to college. Miller and Kerr (2002, 2003) interviewed a diverse group of student-athletes at a large Canadian university and found that the lives of those students revolved around three spheres: an academic sphere, and athletic sphere, and a social sphere.

A key theme that emerged in all of these studies was the balancing of two identities: student and athlete. This self-identity has been examined in relation to student-athletes' career maturity (Murphy, Petitpas, & Brewer, 1996), peer influence (Meyer, 1990; Adler & Adler, 1987, 1991), social isolation (Riemer, Beal, & Schroeder, 2000), and race (Killeya, 2001). In addition, some work has examined how athletic and academic identities change over the course of a college career (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993; Miller & Kerr, 2002; Miller & Kerr, 2003). The literature suggests that student-athletes who are able to maintain a balance between the two identities and view each role positively are more able to adjust to college life (Killeya, 2001) and display a higher level of career maturity (Murphy, Petitpas, & Brewer, 1996). While some coaches and athletic departments stress the importance of the athletic role (Adler & Adler, 1987, 1991; Giacobbi et al., 2004), it is imperative that student-athletes do not discount the significance of the academic role.

Each role presents different challenges for student-athletes. Academically, student-athletes have struggled with the difficulty of classes (Adler & Adler, 1987), prejudiced faculty (Adler & Adler, 1987, 1991; Baucom & Lantz, 2001), staying on course for graduation in order to remain athletically eligible (Holsendolph, 2006), career maturity (Brown & Hartley, 1998; Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993), and finding enough time for homework and studying (Adler & Adler, 1987, 1991; Meyer, 1990; Riemer, Beal, & Schroeder, 2000; Miller & Kerr, 2002, 2003).

Some athletic challenges include the pressure to win, be successful, and compete with upperclassmen (Adler & Adler, 1987, 1991; Meyer, 1990; Giacobbi et al., 2004). In addition, many student-athletes view their collegiate sports participation as more of a job,

which can be stressful, due to the enormous time commitment for their sport (Meyer, 1990; Riemer, Beal, & Schroeder, 2000). Finally, the majority of college student-athletes must also deal with the emotional and psychological stress that comes with the end of their competitive playing careers (Riemer, Beal, & Schroeder, 2000; Miller & Kerr, 2002; Miller & Kerr, 2003). The balancing of academic and athletic priorities and identities is clearly a strenuous task for eighteen to twenty-three year old young adults.

Issues surrounding student-athletes' social lives are also woven throughout the existing literature. Many student-athletes spend their college careers in a state of social isolation, where they spend the majority of their time with other student-athletes and rarely interact with members of the general student population (Adler & Adler, 1987, 1991; Meyer, 1990; Riemer, Beal, & Schroeder, 2000). Student-athletes may also face stereotypes (Meyer, 1990; Veri, 1999), alcohol abuse (Martens, Watson, & Beck, 2006; Hill, Burch-Ragan, & Yates, 2001), and unease at being away from home (Giacobbi et al., 2004).

The challenge of balancing academic and athletic roles, while struggling with socialization, is a major finding of most studies regarding the experiences of college student-athletes. Previous research has focused on female individual sport athletes (Giacobbi et al., 2004; Riemer, Beal, & Schroeder, 2000), female team sport athletes (Meyer, 1990; Riemer, Beal, & Schroeder, 2000), male team sport athletes (Adler & Adler, 1987, 1991), and Canadian athletes from a variety of team and individual sports (Miller & Kerr, 2002; Miller & Kerr, 2003). Male individual sport athletes seem to be under-represented. Additionally, only one of these studies (Giacobbi et al., 2004) deals exclusively with freshmen student-athletes, a group that must cope with these immediate

challenges, while also making a transition to university life. Similar studies with male individual sport athletes and freshmen student-athletes should be conducted.

This study examined the experiences of female team sport student-athletes. While research exists on this segment of intercollegiate student-athletes (Meyer, 1990; Riemer, Beal, & Schroeder, 2000), there are limitations to those studies that will be addressed through the current study. Meyer (1990) analyzed the experiences of women's basketball and volleyball players. However, the data from that study is probably twenty years old. Since 1990, opportunities for female athletes have increased, and women's sports have received greater amounts of media coverage. These facts have likely altered some of the attitudes and experiences of female college athletes.

Riemer, Beal, and Schroeder (2000) provided more recent data, but their sample was split between team sport athletes (women's basketball) and individual sport athletes (women's tennis). The current study does not include any representatives from women's basketball, a sport that is featured in both Meyer's (1990) and Riemer, Beal, and Schroeder's (2000) work. Participants in this study represented women's soccer and softball, two sports that are not included in similar studies. Volleyball, then, is the only sport with multiple participants in the current study and representation in the existing literature (Meyer, 1990). Again, the data from Meyer's (1990) study is probably twenty years old, so this study provides a more contemporary examination of this population.

This current study considered the results of this previous research while replicating Miller and Kerr's (2002) work and extending it to a different student-athlete population. This phenomenological study of the athletic, academic, and social experiences of female intercollegiate team sport student-athletes explored the

participants' challenges and experiences, their ability to balance athletic and academic responsibilities, and their self-identities.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed qualitative methods. I conducted individual interviews with each of the participants. This was done, in part, to follow the methods of Miller and Kerr (2002), and in part, because the perspectives of the participants are valued as the most integral aspect of this study. It is through the words and subjective views of the participants that more knowledge can be gained regarding the experiences of intercollegiate student-athletes.

As Marshall and Rossman (2006) proposed for situations where interviews are the sole data gathering method, I have “demonstrated through the conceptual framework that the purpose of the study is to uncover and describe the participants’ perspectives on events—that is, that the subjective view is what matters” (p. 102). The participants’ perspectives and words are included in the final presentation of the study, demonstrating authenticity and the presence of interpretive rigor (Fossey et al., 2002). As I seek to learn more about the “essence” of the female student-athlete experience, the participants’ views are essential in this study. These methods of data collection and the focus of the study meet the dimensions for the phenomenological research tradition, as described by Creswell (1998).

The participants also had the opportunity to review transcripts of their interviews. They were allowed to change, add to, or remove any comments or sections of their interviews. Miller and Kerr (2002) followed this procedure, which “increased the reliability of the interpretations presented” (p. 352) in their results and discussion sections.

The study replicated Miller and Kerr’s (2002) methods, where they qualitatively studied the athletic, academic, and social lives of eight student-athletes at a large university in Canada. I extended their study to student-athletes in the United States, and in particular, to female team sport athletes who received athletic scholarships at a large, urban Division I university in the southwest. I interviewed seven senior women’s team sport student-athletes at the university.

Sample Description

In addition to being a former intercollegiate student-athlete, I began this project working towards becoming an academic advisor for a college athletic department. I had worked part-time with Student-Athlete Academic Services (SAAS) at UNLV as a tutor, study hall monitor, CHAMPS/Life Skills assistant, and summer intern. Those responsibilities provided me with practical hands-on experience and helped focus my academic research on student-athletes. Over the course of those two academic years, I saw, first-hand, how an academic services department for student-athletes operated. During the process of interviewing participants for this project, another university hired me as an academic coordinator in its intercollegiate athletic department. I accepted the position and began my career in college athletics, while finishing this research project. This study broadened my understanding of student-athletes’ lives and provided me with ideas for effectively assisting them in my current and future roles.

I decided to conduct my study with student-athletes who competed for a university with which I was familiar. While I personally knew the entire athletic academic services staff at the school, I did not know any of the student-athletes I targeted as possible participants in this study. This prevented any conflicts of interest and minimized the chances of the participants being influenced in their responses by previous interactions with me. A university athletic administrator identified all possible participants, based on my criteria. The administrator then provided the possible participants with my contact information so that they could contact me and schedule an interview.

Site of Research

The selected site for this study is a large, urban university in the southwest with an enrollment of approximately 28,000 students. My participants represented the school's intercollegiate athletic department and, more specifically, the women's volleyball, soccer, and softball teams. I chose the school because of its location and easy accessibility for me, the researcher. In addition, the school's athletic teams compete at the Division I level, which is the level at which I prefer to work as an academic advisor and administrator. The fact that the university is affiliated with Division I athletics and is located in the United States made the university a solid site at which to extend Miller and Kerr's (2002) work.

Participants and Participant Selection

In seeking to replicate and extend Miller and Kerr's (2002) study to student-athletes at an American university, my initial goal was to narrow the sample to student-athletes from one particular team. As I describe below, a few problems arose that

prevented me from narrowing to one team. Miller and Kerr (2002) interviewed eight student-athletes in their fourth or fifth year. Their final sample included six athletes from individual sports and two from team sports. The eight participants consisted of four male student-athletes and four female student-athletes.

It is possible that they chose such a mixed sample because their interest was in examining the experiences of Canadian student-athletes, in comparison to previous studies on American student-athletes. The diversity of participants in their study would possibly be more representative of the broad picture of student-athletes in Canada. For the purpose of this study, narrowing the participants to one gender allowed for more detailed examination of this specific group of student-athletes in American, Division I intercollegiate athletics.

In the Canadian study, Miller and Kerr interviewed senior athletes in their fourth or fifth year. I also preferred to interview seniors, since they would be able to look back and reminisce on their entire collegiate experience. In seeking fourth and fifth year student-athletes, I reviewed each of the rosters for the school's sixteen sports. I highlighted each student-athlete who was in his or her fourth or fifth year and added up the totals for each team. Miller and Kerr (2002) interviewed eight participants, and I set that as the minimum number I would use to consider a team for this study. Ideally, I hoped for ten to twelve possible participants on a team, since that number would provide insurance against any possible participants declining to contribute or dropping out after the study began. Unfortunately, only the football team's roster included more than ten fourth and fifth year student-athletes, and I knew many of those students. As a result, I decided against seeking participants from that team. In addition, previous qualitative

research has been conducted with scholarship male athletes in revenue sports (Adler & Adler, 1987, 1991).

Miller and Kerr (2002) suggested interviewing younger student-athletes, and I went back through the rosters to see if it would work with second year student-athletes. Baseball and football had at least ten possible participants, but I knew that, for both teams, at least half of those second year players were walk-ons, student-athletes who do not receive any athletic financial aid. In extending the Canadian study to a school in the United States, it is important to account for student-athletes on scholarship, which is a major difference between college athletics in the two countries. Therefore, I did not want to include any walk-ons in this study (despite the fact that I was a walk-on college athlete myself!).

Going back to the fourth and fifth year count by team, I looked at possible participants by gender sport category (male team, male individual, female individual, female team). I also decided to narrow the field even further by excluding any student-athlete not receiving at least 50% athletic financial aid, based on my reasoning in the previous paragraph. I also wanted to avoid transfer student-athletes, so I added the provision that a possible participant would have to have spent his or her entire college career at the university. Student-athletes who transfer from other institutions may have very different types of experiences than student-athletes who do not transfer. Future research on the experiences of transfer student-athletes could be valuable.

Female team sport athletes stood out, with twelve possible participants, based on the above criteria. (It is important to note that I estimated the scholarship information, based on personal knowledge of the sports. I did not have access to official scholarship

information, without IRB approval.) Eleven of the twelve began their college careers in the fall of 2004. I eliminated the student-athlete who began her time at the university in the fall of 2003, due to this difference and the fact that she graduated in December 2007 and moved away from the city. This final group of eleven participants included four softball players, three soccer players, three volleyball players, and one basketball player.

A month prior to the start of the actual interviews, I conducted a pilot study interview with a student-athlete who met all of the criteria, except for the fact that she began her career at the school in 2005. This interview lasted longer than any of the actual interviews, and it confirmed the effectiveness of the prepared interview questions. I made only minor changes to the list of questions. Perhaps the most significant change was the addition of the question regarding the student-athletes' interactions with fans. The pilot study participant discussed questionable behavior by her team's fans, which raised a question about the effect of overzealous fans on female student-athletes.

Following the pilot study, I received approval to conduct research from UNLV's Social/Behavioral Institutional Review Board on June 27, 2008. The university athletic administrator contacted the participants and provided them with my contact information. Seven of the eleven possible participants contacted me to schedule an interview. I conducted interviews with all seven. The administrator was able to contact three of the remaining four, but none of them attempted to contact me to participate in the study. Four softball players, two volleyball players, and one soccer player made up the group of student-athletes who participated in this research study.

Those willing to participate responded to interview questions about their college experiences. Their responses shed additional light on the academic, athletic, and social

lives of intercollegiate student-athletes. This group of participants represented the perspectives of a more specific group than that used in the model study. Interviewing female team sport scholarship athletes increased the body of knowledge regarding that specific segment of the intercollegiate athletic population.

Procedures

I interviewed each participant once. This differed from Miller and Kerr's (2002) methods. They interviewed each participant twice, allowing a four month gap in between the interviews. They used a second round of interviews to test working hypotheses from the first interviews and to ask additional clarification and elaboration questions, based on analysis from the first interviews. I transcribed the first four interviews in between conducting them, in order to pick up additional topics immediately and follow-up on those issues in subsequent interviews.

I followed Miller and Kerr's (2002) template by allowing each participant to respond to the broad prompt, "Tell me about your experiences as a student-athlete here at [the school] over the last four to five years." Unlike Miller and Kerr, I did not lead off the interview with this prompt. Instead, I asked the student-athletes why they chose to attend the school and what motivated them to want to compete in their sport at the college level. I did this to ease the participants into the interview and to help build rapport with them.

I anticipated that many of the issues that have been addressed in previous literature related to student-athletes would be discussed by the participants. I included questions that reflected different themes from previous research, such as dealing with stress, identity conflict, the impact of teammates and coaches, social isolation,

professional aspirations, stereotypes, and time management. A list of these questions is presented in Appendix I.

After the participants answered, I often followed up with clarification and elaboration questions. Clarification questions ask the interviewee to further explain an idea, theme, or phrase, while elaboration probes seek to gather extra information or have the participant discuss the topic in greater depth (Miller & Kerr, 2002). Sample clarification questions cited by Miller and Kerr (2002) included, “‘Earlier you used the term superstars. Can you explain what you meant?’ and ‘You described that sport helped you stay focused. Can you give me an example of this?’” (p. 350). Sample elaboration questions include, “‘Can you tell me more about how you decided to come to this university?’ [and] ‘Earlier you mentioned being pulled in different directions. Can you describe this feeling?’” (p. 351). Along these same lines, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggest that a good interviewer “probes the respondent to be specific, asking for examples of points that are made. When asking the respondent about the past, for example, the interviewer suggests that he or she think back to that time and try to relive it...[Participants] need encouragement to elaborate” (p. 104-105). I reviewed these examples before each interview to make sure that I adequately prepared myself to ask these types of follow-up questions.

Miller and Kerr’s (2002) initial interviews lasted between ninety and one hundred and fifty minutes in length. They were all audio-recorded and transcribed. Likewise, I asked for the participants’ permission to tape record the interviews, and I transcribed the interviews, as well. The length of my interviews ranged from thirty to fifty-five minutes, with most of them taking around 45 minutes. Two participants were not available to do a

face-to-face interview, so we made arrangements to conduct those interviews by phone. I also recorded those interviews, and the structure of the interviews did not differ from the face-to-face interviews, which Miller and Kerr (2002) also discovered with the one phone interview that they carried out.

After I finished transcribing all seven interviews, I e-mailed each participant a copy of her interview transcript. The participants could change, add to, delete, or revise any of their comments. None of them elected to do so. Pseudonyms are used in this study to protect the identities of the participants.

Data Analysis

Analysis began when I transcribed the audio taped interviews. By transcribing the tapes myself, I became more familiar with the data. I benefited from transcribing the early interviews prior to conducting later interviews. Doing this allowed me to identify emerging themes, which I then sought to explore in greater detail during the later interviews.

In their data analysis, Miller and Kerr (2002) “tagged” text that contained a single idea. They then pooled together similar tags into groups called properties. The properties were linked together into categories. In my data analysis, I followed a similar path, remaining flexible to accommodate any unforeseen issues or categories.

The first research question in this study asked, ““What are the current and past academic, athletic, and social experiences of senior female scholarship team sport student-athletes at a large, urban Division I university?” After reading through the transcripts multiple times, I created a list of themes that emerged, in relation to the experiences of the participants. I identified seven different areas that connected to this

first research question. The seven experience themes included the selection process that led the student-athletes to the university; the transition from high school to college life; the role of the athletic scholarship; personal relationships with teammates, friends, coaches, staff members, and fans; personal growth and maturation; enjoyment of the sport and the spirit of competition; and developing important skills that can be extended to careers and life, in general.

After I identified these eight areas, I went through each transcript and “tagged” sections that related to a specific theme. I copied and pasted those sections into a separate electronic document for each theme, thus “pooling” them together into properties. Finally, I reviewed each of those properties and pulled out “categories” within those properties, using them to organize the content of Chapter Four. I utilized this same procedure in addressing the second and third research questions, as well.

Two other individuals read all of the interview transcripts independently and identified the same themes. The inclusion of these two readers strengthened the trustworthiness of the data presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The seven participants in this study are student-athletes who generally experienced athletic and academic success through four years of college. Five of the participants completed their athletic eligibility in four years, and the other two have one more year of eligibility, due to injuries. The experiences of these student-athletes may be different from those of student-athletes who do not remain involved in intercollegiate athletics for the duration of their eligibility.

The first research question in this study is “What are the current and past academic, athletic, and social experiences of senior female scholarship team sport student-athletes at a large, urban Division I university?” Some of the key themes that emerged, in relation to these experiences, include the selection process that led the student-athletes to the university; the transition from high school to college life; personal relationships with teammates, friends, coaches, staff members, and fans; the role of the athletic scholarship; personal growth and maturation; enjoyment of the sport and the spirit of competition; and developing important skills that can be extended to careers and life, in general. Each of these themes will be addressed in detail.

The second research question is “How do these student-athletes balance these three aspects (academic, athletic, and social) of their lives?” The participants prioritized,

completed schoolwork at uncommon times and places, managed and planned their time, and avoided procrastination by completing homework right away, in order to help them balance multiple tasks and commitments.

The final research question asks, “How do these student-athletes define and construct their identities?” The seven participants had balanced identities, in which they viewed themselves as *both* students and athletes. Most of them admitted, though, that their athletic identity usually had a slight edge over the student identity during their college careers, mainly due to the enormous time commitments and job-like nature of their sports participation.

Research Question #1: What are the current and past academic, athletic, and social experiences of senior female scholarship team sport student-athletes at a large, urban Division I university?

Entry to University. The participants’ college experiences began during the process of selecting a school. These student-athletes considered different athletic, academic, and social factors in making their decisions. When they arrived on campus, nearly all were adequately prepared to succeed academically. This level of preparation also played an important role in their early collegiate experiences. Their reasons for attending the university and their preparation for college class work were key elements in their entry to the university.

The seven participants cited a number of reasons for choosing to attend the university. The school’s geographic location, its academic programs, its athletic facilities, the presence of a campus church, and the city in which the school is located were among the reasons given. Ruth, the international student, whose major goal was to go to the

United States and play her sport in college, claimed that she “didn’t really choose to attend [university]. It was more like [university] chose” her, and she jumped at the opportunity to come to the U.S. and meet her goal, immediately out of high school.

Nearly all of the participants mentioned academics when asked why they chose to attend the school. The international student, Ruth, spoke of attending school in America as a motivation, but she did not discuss specifics related to the academic programs of the university. Only one participant claimed that academics played little or no role in her decision. Debbie said, “I knew they had [an academic program in which I was interested], so it helped. But really, I was coming for [sport].”

The other five student-athletes indicated that consideration was given to the academic programs offered at the university. Ruby suggested that the presence of a specific major was “pretty big,” especially since some other schools that recruited her only offered more general forms of the particular academic discipline to which she was attracted. Other participants pointed to the presence of various academic majors offered at the school, and Krista cited the “good reputation” of the university, adding that it seemed like “a nice place to be and have your education pursued.”

The major reason that most of the participants selected the university, though, was the coaching staff of each of the teams represented in this study. Five out of the seven participants suggested that the coaching staff played a crucial role in their decision, and some even claimed that the coaching staff was the main reason for electing to attend the school. Barbara said that the coaching staff was “probably my number one motivator to go there.” Ruby claimed that she chose to attend the school, in large part, because she “liked the coach” and he “made me feel like I was wanted.”

The coaching staffs that were credited with leading these participants to the school demonstrated, during recruiting visits, that they cared about their student-athletes as people, and not just as athletes. Tracy said that she was treated well on her recruiting trip, and that “it felt like a family atmosphere to me...It felt like home.” Krista described her initial feelings about the importance of the coaching staff in her college decision:

I felt that having coaches that you love to play for, and want to play for, was one of the most important things, and I immediately, you know, just loved my three coaches and felt like it was an honor to play for them... It was their passion for the game and their care for not only you, as a athlete on our team, but as an individual, and wanting their goal to make you better every year, not only as a softball player, but as a person, and give you a full package and a full college experience, and, uh, just take your game—your [sport] game—to the next level.

Two participants did not indicate that the coaches significantly influenced their school selection. Ruth, the international student, did credit the coaches with showing interest in her, but she did not necessarily select the school because she liked the coaches. She chose the school because it was her only chance to play her sport at an American university. Carol claimed that the on-campus church institute and the level of sports competition were the most important factors in her decision, while the coaches “really didn’t play that big of a role.”

The participants generally experienced a rather easy transition to the academic rigors of college. When asked to compare the grades they received during their first year of college to their high school grades, nearly all suggested that their college grades were

similar to their grades in high school. Krista even revealed that her grades as a freshman in college were “a little bit better” than her grades in high school.

The student-athletes in this study brought up a few reasons for their easy transition to college schoolwork. Debbie credited her high school with preparing her to succeed academically at the college level. Tracy suggested that the newfound, personal independence in college might have been a bigger academic challenge, if it hadn't been for support from her fellow freshmen teammates. She said that “it made it a lot easier to have a little buddy...to run around and help out and keep you on track.” Krista mentioned that the mandatory study hall during her freshman year was an important part of her academic success, because “it taught you, you know, to stay focused...and I think that that kind of got me on a routine.”

Some of the other participants indicated that the college classes were less challenging than they had imagined. Carol said that her first year at the university “just felt like it was high school. It really wasn't that difficult for me.” Barbara expected her freshman courses to be more difficult: “I didn't feel like I was challenged to the point where I couldn't handle it...It was definitely easier than I thought it was gonna be.” Tracy and Ruby also suggested that the general, lower-level classes of their freshmen years contributed to their easier-than-expected transitions to college.

The only participant who experienced a drop in her grades, from high school to the first year of college, was Ruth, the international student. She attributed the lower grades to the difficulty she faced in learning a new language and learning “how to be a student here.” Ruth stated that “the first semester was a little tough, but then it got better.”

Personal Relationships. The process of selecting a university and then making the transition from high school to college occurred during the beginning stages of these student-athletes' college careers. Each of the five remaining themes involved experiences that took place throughout the participants' four years at the university. The importance of personal relationships is the first of these themes.

All seven participants spoke positively about the relationships they established and built during their time at the university. They discussed the centrality of positive interactions and significant bonds with teammates, coaches, administrators, support staff, professors, friends outside of athletics, and even fans to their athletic, academic, and social experiences as student-athletes. When asked what they enjoyed most about their experiences as student-athletes at the school, three of the seven responded by saying that the people they met and the friendships they shared were the most enjoyable aspects of their college experience.

Debbie spoke of the camaraderie and relationships built through her athletic involvement as the most enjoyable part of her experience. Carol responded to the question by saying, "My teammates. I love those girls, and that's what I enjoyed, was being around them." Tracy said, "It's the people. It's been the biggest thing for me. Just, uh, the connections and people that I've met and just being a part of it all. It's been pretty cool."

Participants discussed relationships with teammates in an extremely positive light. Ruby stated, "The girls were always nice, and I loved my teammates." Barbara added, "I think I've built friendships that are gonna last the rest of my life." Despite some separation from teammates that came about as a result of her differences, Ruth

acknowledged the impact of the three teammates with whom she had made it through four years together: “They had the most influence on me...They really became like sisters to me...Because we’ve been through a lot together...We’ve been there for each other.”

Perhaps the most vigorous and enthusiastic portrayal of teammates came from Carol. She spoke glowingly about her teammates, despite admitting that she experienced separation from them socially, as a result of her religious beliefs. She spoke of her team’s “amazing bond,” how her teammates were really good friends, and the fact that “that’s what made it fun for me...was because of the friendships and all that, that we kind of had together.” Carol especially appreciated the support and encouragement her teammates provided in her sport:

Athletically, I loved my teammates (laughs). They...you know what? If anyone came into our locker room and was having a rough day, we all jumped to help that person. We did anything we could to help them, to talk them through things, to let them know that we were right there behind them. And that was what helped a lot of us get through. We...you know, it’s hard. There’s days you hate it, there’s days you can’t stand each other, there’s days you hate [sport]. But when you have the amazing, um, teammates that I had, it helped me a lot athletically, because it gave me that added push to get through each day.

In addition to developing relationships as teammates, all but one of the participants also lived with at least one teammate during their college careers. Carol never roomed with a teammate or any student-athlete. After her freshman year, she met all of her roommates through her church. Besides her, all of the other participants

experienced living with one or more teammates for at least part of their four years at the school.

Debbie said, “I think you have to live with teammates...well, athletes, ‘cause they’re the only ones that understand your...your scheduling and everything like that.” Barbara, Krista, and Ruby also spoke about the benefits associated with being on the same type of schedule as their student-athlete roommates. Tracy said that having teammates as roommates “keeps you on track.” Ruth lived with other student-athletes until her final year, when she roomed with a non-athlete. She preferred living with athletes because they understood her need for rest better than the non-athlete roommate, and she also suggested that she “can just communicate better” with other athletes. While Carol enjoyed living with non-athletes, she did have a bad experience with a roommate in the dorms during her freshman year that made her wish that she had had a roommate who was a student-athlete:

I got really sick my freshman year, like, right when I got in, because I couldn’t go to sleep because she’d have her TV blaring and she’d be like, coming in and out of the room. And that was hard for me to deal with because she didn’t understand that I needed my sleep and the kind of schedule that I was on. And I think that, if I had roomed with a student-athlete, that my freshman year of college, in the dorms, that I would have been a little more successful, and, obviously, I would think I would have stayed healthier.

Living with teammates, though, was not always a perfect situation, as some of the participants indicated. “It’s like you can never escape, kind of, the [sport] world,” Tracy said. “It’s like twenty-four/seven, and sometimes, you know, you need that little break,

just mentally.” Barbara suggested that rooming with teammates could be a disadvantage “when things are going bad, and you just kind of want to get away from it for a little while.” Krista also pointed out the negative side of living with teammates: “You don’t really get that space...that you might want or need, or...time away from your athletics.” The participants did not view this inability to withdraw from the athletic realm as having a negative impact on their personal relationships with teammates, though. The positive aspects of living with teammates generally outweighed the negatives, and nearly all of the student-athletes in this study said that they preferred to live with teammates or other student-athletes.

In addition to establishing strong relationships with teammates, these student-athletes also discussed the importance of bonding with their coaches. Many of the participants appreciated that their coaches demonstrated care for their athletes’ overall well-being, rather than solely focusing on their athletic abilities. They viewed their coaches as mentors, friends, and even parental figures.

Debbie claimed that her coaches “were strong. They were kind of like my parents away from home.” Krista complimented her coaches when she said, “I definitely had a great experience, overall. And a lot of that had to do with the program I was in and the people running it—so, the coaches.” Ruby credited her coach with helping her secure internship positions that would help her achieve her career goals. In transitioning to life in America, Ruth’s comfort level with an assistant coach helped her through some early challenges. Tracy praised her coaching staff’s approach to working with the team:

They're good people. It's pretty awesome. You don't find that very often, you know? You find coaches sometimes, who, you're just a player, another athlete. But, that's again, like I was saying, it's like a family atmosphere.

One member of the athletic department's administration also had an important influence on many of this study's participants. The administration's academic expectations for student-athletes "were very clear," according to Barbara. The specific administrator demonstrated to some of the women in this study that he expected a lot from them, academically and in their future endeavors. Krista described her respect for this administrator:

He likes to give advice or his wisdom on life and life concepts and experiences...for the betterment of me, individually. And I've always appreciated that, because it's not always about [sport] or school. It's about the person and, you know, what I can learn from him, which is pretty neat.

Carol credited the administrator with inspiring her to be successful and for helping her through a difficult conflict with her coach. Ruby revealed that she was "good friends" with the administrator, and he helped her search for jobs and internships. Tracy also indicated that she had a "good relationship" with him. The participants who discussed this administrator appreciated this relationship and felt that they benefited from interacting with him.

Debbie developed strong relationships with two other members of the athletic department. She indicated that she became very close with her athletic trainer and strength and conditioning coach. She said that they "were sometimes the only people I could talk to." She continued to explain her relationship with them:

If things got too hairy with all the girls, or too emotional with the roommates because we were too close of friends, like, they were great outlets to go to, you know what I mean? 'Cause you can talk to your parents, but sometimes they don't always understand your situation, 'cause they're not living it, like the athletic trainer and the strength coach pretty much are. They're living your life, pretty much, just from a little different view, and, um, they were...they're like our shrinks. They just...you just go off and just talk, talk, talk, talk, talk. And they're great because they don't really repeat it, 'cause they can't, you know? So they're...they're awesome. I love having them around.

Some participants also cited positive relationships with professors. One professor had such an influence on Carol that he increased her desire to pursue her career goal. A few of the participants indicated that their instructors respected the in-class and in-competition efforts that they, as student-athletes, put forth. The student-athletes worked hard in class to gain the respect of their professors, whom they felt might label them with negative stereotypes related to student-athletes. They also mentioned that some instructors attended their games, which they appreciated.

Participants also highlighted instances where the support of friends from outside the athletic realm benefited them. The friends that Carol made through her church provided support and encouragement, both at her games and away from her sport. Krista felt that it was important to meet people outside of athletics, in order to "have a balance," and she found friends through classes and on-campus organizations. One of Barbara's roommates was not a student-athlete, and Barbara enjoyed being able to confide in that

roommate about sensitive issues related to the team that she would not be comfortable discussing with team members.

Ruth found support through friends who were not teammates, as well, although many of them were still student-athletes in other sports. The university's athletic program included other student-athletes from Ruth's country, and she often sought their advice:

Just asking them questions. Like, if...if I was to encounter something that I didn't know how to handle, I could call them and like, "Hey, has this happened to you, and how...how did you go about it? Like, what'd you do?" And if they had, they would tell me. So, that definitely helps because they are athletes, as well, and they are international students, so they would know.

In addition to student-athletes from her country, Ruth also befriended another international student who competed in a different sport. She indicated that this friend was helpful and supportive throughout her college career, no matter the situation. Ruth, like the other participants, expressed gratitude for the variety of friendships she made during her time at the school.

Interesting relationships also developed with fans. The women in this study all appreciated fan support, and some spoke of the enjoyment they gained from talking to fans, especially the young fans. The teams used community service, game promotions, and youth clinics to draw fans and generate more interest for the sport and, in particular, the school's team. A few participants, though, also discussed situations in which the coaching staff had to shield the players from obsessive fans.

These seven student-athletes spoke positively, overall, about their team's fan base. Two participants even said that they "loved" their fans. Softball, soccer, and

volleyball, the three sports represented in this study, do not receive as much attention on campus or exposure in the media as the school's men's revenue sports of football and basketball, and the participants expressed gratitude for the fans who did attend games consistently and who showed support for the teams' efforts. Ruth said, "You have to work hard...to get people to come and appreciate what you're doing." Carol added that her coach "was very strong about thanking our fans, making sure that everyone who came was very welcomed and felt as though we truly appreciate them being there." Carol's team regularly talked to the fans, so that the fans could see the players as more than just athletes who entertained them. Barbara also indicated that her team approached fans, especially the team's few loyal fans, after games and thanked them for attending. "It helped a lot," she said, "that we interacted with them and that they knew us and that was why they came to the games."

The coaching staffs utilized community service, game promotions, and youth clinics as vehicles for increasing fan attendance and interest. Krista said, "Those things, I just feel have all been very positive." Debbie contributed this thought on the extra efforts with fans: "It got exhausting at some points, but, in the end, it was always worth it because then we had a couple extra fans at the game."

While the participants generally had positive experiences with fans, a few of these student-athletes provided some examples of "creepy" or "weird" fans. Two participants said that their team had to address certain situations with some of these fans, who were generally men in their thirties or forties. Problems arose, according to one student-athlete, with "fans finding ways to see you, outside of [sport], or showing up at certain places that they know that the team will be, or...asking for private information, like e-mails or cell

phone numbers.” Another participant claimed that her name and the names of two other teammates appeared on a list given to the head coach by a male fan who wanted the three players “to come to his house and have dinner with him and help him clean the house.” In these types of instances, the coaches “have had to tell these certain people that they’re too close to us and they need to back off.” While interactions with these types of fans did not emerge as a serious or prevalent theme in this study, future research should explore interactions between obsessive fans and female college athletes.

Teammates, coaches, and staff members positively influenced these student-athletes. Friends from outside the athletic realm also provided support for the participants. The seven women discussed relationships with fans, as well. These personal relationships that the student-athletes experienced over the course of their four years at the school significantly affected their experiences.

The role of the athletic scholarship. The participants benefited not only from the personal relationships they developed in college, but also from the athletic scholarship money they earned. Each of the seven participants received at least fifty percent athletic financial aid. They all appreciated the financial benefits of the athletic scholarship. These student-athletes also discussed the job-like feeling that their scholarships created, and a couple of them described how coaches used the scholarship as motivation for performance.

The participants spoke of the fact that their athletic scholarships freed them of at least some financial stress. One student-athlete who received a full-scholarship in each of her four years said that her athletic aid “made it a lot easier,” especially since she did not have to take out any student loans. Another participant called the scholarship “helpful,”

since she didn't have to "worry too much about...finances and money," and she didn't have to "get a side job to work." A participant who attended school on a partial athletic scholarship did have to take out a small loan and did not receive a stipend, like full scholarship athletes, but she said, "I'm grateful for everything I have because it puts me already ahead when graduation comes."

Tracy considered her collegiate sports participation to be her job, and she said that there is "a little bit" of pressure that comes with being on scholarship. "You serve a duty, you know, to those people that gave you the money," she said, "and you should be accountable for, you know, getting good grades and being able to perform [athletically]." Krista suggested that she is held to "a different expectation" because of her scholarship. She added, "I'm ok with that, and I don't really, uh, think of it as pressure. Just a challenge, and I believe that I can fulfill, or live up to, the standards that my coaches and administrators expect me to." Ruby agreed that the scholarship made her sport participation feel like a job during the off-season, when she was required to attend practices early in the morning. She said, "When you're waking up, you're like, 'Ok, there's a good part to this. I'm getting paid for it, at least.'"

Coaches used the scholarship as motivation with a couple of the participants. Ruby did not begin her career on a full scholarship, but she said that she was told that she would get more scholarship money if her on-field and in-classroom performances remained consistent and strong. She claimed that having this knowledge was "a motivating thing" early in her career.

Another participant went through a difficult and uncomfortable interaction with her coach over the scholarship. This student-athlete felt that the scholarship created "a

higher expectation for you to perform.” In this case, the coach felt that this student-athlete’s performance was not meeting that higher expectation:

We had a meeting, and quite honestly, it was the most uncomfortable meeting that I’ve ever had in my whole life. Um, she just told me that, you know, there was a business side to all this, and she didn’t feel like I was giving her a hundred percent of my effort, which I felt that I was. Um, it’s kind of a long story, but I had been starting that year, and then she pulled me, and I didn’t start again, and...um, for a couple games. And it was a little un-motivating. It’s, you know...it’s hard. But, um...my athletic scholarship definitely played a role then, because it was kind of dangled over me, like, you know, “I can take this away from you, if you don’t do this.”

The participants viewed their athletic financial aid as a definite financial benefit. Some also indicated that their scholarship created the feeling that their athletic participation constituted a job and that a certain amount of pressure existed to take care of their responsibilities off the field/court and to perform well in competition. In one case, a participant became motivated to improve her overall performance when she was told that her athletic aid could be increased. In another case, a coach threatened to reduce or take away a participant’s scholarship, due to the coach’s perception of the student-athlete’s effort and performance. The athletic scholarships these seven women received played valuable roles in their college experiences.

Personal growth and maturation. The participants felt that they grew as individuals and matured over the course of their college careers. Examples of this personal growth and maturation include becoming more independent and responsible;

learning through community service projects; learning how to meet and connect with new people; developing character and leadership; overcoming fears about people who are different; and discovering important lessons through battles with injuries and conflicts with coaches.

Ruth, the international student-athlete, described her four years at the school as “a learning experience...a growing up experience.” In addition to adjusting to a new culture, she also said that she learned “how to be independent” in college. Without the everyday support of her parents, who remained overseas, Ruth contemplated leaving the country. “I appreciate the fact that I came here, now that I’m looking back,” she said. “I’m grateful that I didn’t chicken out and leave.” As a result of her decision to remain in the United States, Ruth matured as an individual and she said, “Being a student-athlete here taught me to be more responsible and more goal-directed.”

Like Ruth, Carol felt that her experiences as an intercollegiate student-athlete helped her grow up. She learned and gained knowledge. Carol also explained how being a student-athlete helped her become independent and responsible:

I feel like, as a student-athlete, you become more independent. I think that you are given the responsibility...a lot more responsibility than some people, because you have to take care of yourself and be able to perform at the best of your abilities.

You have to make sure you’re eating right, make sure you’re getting enough sleep, and I feel as though I’ve learned those things of how to take care of myself a lot quicker than most people.

Four participants viewed team community service projects as important parts of their experience. These participants discussed doing promotional activities, reading to

children in elementary school classrooms, visiting sick children in hospitals, and spending time with disadvantaged youth.

These four student-athletes spoke positively about their community service experiences. “I could go on and on about community service,” Tracy said, with a laugh. Debbie stated, “We took a lot of pride in taking the [city] community and bringing them into our program.” Krista added, “We do a lot of community work, and we’re always out and involved...I enjoy it.”

Barbara spoke extensively about the impact that her team’s community service work had on her, calling it “a life-changing experience.” She said that she “never would have been exposed” to ill or underprivileged children if she hadn’t been a member of her team. She went on:

It reminds me how lucky I am to have my health. And it makes me kind of have that compassion for other people, and it always makes me remember that I’m lucky that I have my health, and that I have family and things like that...But those were things that really kind of open your eyes to other things.

Some of the participants also improved their interpersonal communication skills through their athletic experiences. Krista said that the coaches encouraged the team to “get out of our comfort zone” and learn how to talk to people. Barbara described the effect that this approach had on her:

It did teach me how to talk to people. You know, a lot of people are—including myself, before I got there—are kind of apprehensive, when it comes to approaching someone that they don’t know and striking up a conversation. I mean, I...we had to do that all the time. Our coach would say, like, “Go introduce

yourself. Go over there.” You know? “Tell them about yourself, or go...this person is, you know, this person, and go meet them.” So, it definitely taught me how to talk to people, and eye contact, and things like that.

Participants grew as leaders and built character through their experiences, as well. Tracy served as a team captain and discussed the challenges she faced in helping her teammates maintain a positive attitude in the face of adversity. Ruby said that her experiences as a student-athlete helped her “to grow up and to grow, as a woman...grow into a woman.” She explained that “being faced with different challenges” and having to balance her athletic, academic, and social lives contributed to her personal growth and helped build her character.

Another interesting example of personal growth came from Debbie’s discussion of one of the fears that she had, as an incoming student-athlete:

There’s a few lesbian people on the [sport] team, so that was a...a scare of mine coming in. I was kind of wondering...I didn’t know any homosexual people before I got here, and so...and I kind of knew that [sport] tends to have a few of ‘em, and so I was intimidated by that, at first. And...but, then they became my friends, and it wasn’t...you know, I was...I was way more scared than I needed to be. It is totally normal. I think that that opened my eyes a lot, coming from “Suburbia Cow Town” that really didn’t happen, and when I got here from...and met people from all over, it was normal, and they’re normal. And that doesn’t mean I have to be gay, either, you know? And so that was a big challenge, for me (laughs).

This new view of people helped Debbie deal with other students who made comments to her about the sexual orientation of the team. "I just kind of try to put, like, into that person's life what I didn't have coming into college" she said, adding that she would use that perspective to respond appropriately and maturely.

Personal growth and maturation also occurred for the participants who either battled injuries, clashed with coaches, or suffered through disappointing seasons. Five of the seven participants discussed being injured at some point in their careers. Two participants missed entire seasons, as a result of their injuries. Problems regarding playing time and disagreements with coaches also arose for three of the student-athletes. In addition, one of the teams represented in this study faced disappointing results in competition, and those team members talked about dealing with the frustrations associated with poor seasons. The participants who revealed these issues generally took an optimistic view of the long-term effects of these experiences.

Tracy and Krista both dealt with serious injuries in their four years at the school. Tracy said, "Getting hurt has really been the biggest challenge for me...I've had to deal with the idea that I can't...I'm not gonna always be able to play, like with a hundred percent, and I just kind of have to give what I have." She added, "It's frustrating...it's a very frustrating thing." Krista claimed that her injuries forced her to take on a new role within the team: "Not, uh, being the sole focus on the field, but more, uh, bringing my teammates together and leading them in other ways, while I'm not playing...was challenging."

Despite these challenges and the setbacks that prevented them from competing, both women did their best to remain optimistic. “I realized it’s only gonna make me stronger, in the end,” Tracy said. Krista approached her injuries in this manner:

I would say I did my best to put things in perspective, and I was able to keep a positive attitude, which kept...which brought me through a lot, and it would be so easy to get down and give up...give it up, and, you know, think negatively. But instead, I used all of my strength and power to turn it into a different outlook and make me...push me to make me want it even more. So when the time comes, when I get the chance to play again, every opportunity...I’m gonna appreciate every moment I’m out there, because I know what it’s taken to get out there.

Less serious injuries afflicted three other participants during their intercollegiate athletic careers. Ruby experienced a “roller coaster” freshman year because of a foot injury. A horse stepped on Carol’s foot when she went horseback riding in the off-season, causing her to miss practice time and put her behind her teammates in preparation for the following season. The unlikely injury compelled her to examine the necessity of her activities away from the sport. She said, “I should have been a little more like, ‘Ok, Carol, make sure you’re staying away from every possible thing you could do to get hurt.’”

An injury aggravated Ruth to the point that she took out her frustration on the team’s trainers, especially when they would not let her practice or play, because of her injury. “I had problems with trainers because, um, I really wanted to play,” she said. “I was taking it all out on them. Like, ‘I don’t want to be here. I don’t like English. I don’t want to be in the United States.’” She understood that “they were doing their job,” but

she let all of her frustrations out on them “just because they were right there. And they were making it tough.” Despite some struggles and frustrations, Ruth viewed the difficult experiences she faced as opportunities to build character. “Building character is not something that you can do with only positive things happening to you, so you have to fall before you learn to...stand up,” she said. “So I guess it’s not necessarily negative. It’s constructive.”

Conflicts arose between some of the participants and their coaches. These conflicts stemmed from disagreements over playing time and student-athletes’ roles on the team. In one case, the student-athlete initiated a meeting to address difficulties the entire team had with the coach.

Debbie’s senior season ended on a sour note, after her role on the team diminished significantly mid-way through the season. She called the second half of the year “the biggest negative thing I’ve ever experienced” and said that she went through “the most negative emotion I ever felt.” She continued working hard, though, earning respect from her teammates, as well as compliments from the coaches who kept her on the bench. Debbie said, “I hated ‘em [the coaches] at one point, and in my exit meeting...they heard exactly what I was feeling, and it wasn’t pretty.” Still, Debbie took a positive and “big picture” view of the relationships with her coaches, even after the disappointing conclusion to her career. She said that her relationship with the coaching staff “is better” after that ugly exit meeting at the end of the year. “Even though it didn’t end well, I still had three and a half great years,” she said. “They were my parents and everything, and they pushed me in the right direction.”

Unlike Debbie, Barbara's frustrations with playing time endured throughout her entire four years of athletic eligibility. Despite a decorated high school career, she did not start consistently in college. "I kind of struggled with that my whole career there," she said, "because I wanted to be a starter every game." Barbara persevered and continued to work hard, saying that she "tried to focus on the positive things" she had accomplished in the past. "I just told myself that I was there for a reason, and that, if I didn't belong there, I wouldn't be there anymore." By her own estimation, she started at least seventy-five percent of the games after her freshman year. For someone accustomed to starting every game, though, even starting three-quarters of the games did not satisfy Barbara.

Carol declined to go into detail about a conflict that she and her teammates had with their coach, but she did indicate that "for one season, it took all the fun of [sport] out." This problem with the coach developed into an issue that eventually needed to be addressed. "We all kind of put up with it...and never said anything and just went along with it," Carol said. "And finally, we...well, I kind of initiated it and said, 'Let's open our mouths, and let's say something, because this isn't right.'"

In retrospect, Carol claimed that this difficult experience taught her how to speak her mind and deal with tough situations. She explained how she approached the conflict and the lesson she learned from it:

The way I dealt with it is I just held it all in and cried my eyes out at night, or, you know, just kind of talked to a friend about it, and I realized that it wasn't the best way for me to handle it. And looking back, that's where I've learned that I shouldn't do that. I needed to voice my opinion and say things and let people know how I was feeling because my coaching staff had no idea how unhappy I

was and how frustrated I was, because I just hid it all from them. And I now see that, if I would have just said things or let them know, it could have been a completely different season for me.

All three of the programs represented in this study experienced athletic success at some point during the course of the participants' four years. This success included conference championships and NCAA post-season appearances. However, one of the programs also went through some disappointing and unsuccessful years. One of the participants from that team expressed frustration with the athletic commitment of some of her teammates, saying, "They could make themselves better, but they don't choose to, and that's kind of frustrating sometimes, 'cause it affects the whole team." This particular team also experienced numerous injuries, which may have led, in part, to some of its struggles. One team member took a positive view towards a negative situation, when discussing the misfortunes of the team:

We've had a lot of injuries and a lot of stuff, but what's cool about that is, on the other side, adversity—we've learned how to handle that, and realize that with whatever you have, it's kind of, that's what you go to battle with, so it's been a good experience.

Many of the participants displayed this type of positive attitude towards negative events. They tended to take an optimistic approach and point out the positives results of experiencing difficult situations during their intercollegiate athletic careers. Participants discussed injuries, coaching conflicts, and disappointing seasons by not only describing the frustrations of those experiences, but also the lessons they learned and skills they gained from going through the situations.

The participants grew up and matured in their college years, becoming more independent and responsible, while learning how to meet and interact with a variety of different people. They faced challenges and fears, and, in the process, became better, more developed leaders. Community service work taught them about the lives of those who were less fortunate and made them appreciate the good things in their lives. They also demonstrated maturity by highlighting the positive lessons they learned from facing negative situations, such as injuries, disagreements with coaches, and losing seasons.

Enjoyment of the sport and the spirit of competition. The participants all enjoyed competing in their sport. Two cited competition, or playing, in general, as the most enjoyable aspect of their college experience, while two others pointed to team accomplishments as the most satisfying part of being a student-athlete at the university. The competitive nature expressed by these women, combined with their self-professed love of their sport, may have helped them make it through four full years as intercollegiate student-athletes.

Team success made competing even more fun for these student-athletes. Ruby said, "That's the best high I could ever have is winning, like, conferences or championship games." According to Krista, team achievements "always, in the end, feel the best, because we worked so hard for those things, and we've accomplished them together." Post-season success created enjoyment and memories for both Tracy and Carol. Tracy's team success came early in her career, and she said, "After reflecting on that year, you realize, like, how special those memories are." Carol's team made the NCAA Tournament one year, and she looked back on that experience:

Just going through that whole process and just watching how we all worked our butts off to do the...like, what we could, in order to get there and earn, kind of, some respect...was so...it was really enjoyable to me, and competing in those games...every game was a blast. Like, it just was...it was just so fun. Like, as I look back, I just...I enjoyed every aspect of it.

While being part of a successful team likely made it easier to enjoy competition, some of the participants indicated that their love of playing their sport had as much, if not more, to do with their enjoyment of competition than winning. For example, Ruth stated, "I didn't really care that much about winning or losing. It was more the fact that we're playing." She went on to say that the seniors on her team during her freshman year told the newcomers to enjoy their four years, since it seemed to go by fast to them. Ruth understood what they meant at the end of *her* senior season, saying, "It really went by fast, and I do feel happy that, um, I enjoyed playing, most of anything."

Carol explained why she enjoyed playing in games when she said, "I'm extremely competitive, so any aspect of competing was super enjoyable to me." Similarly, Krista declared, "I just loved the game, and I enjoyed playing it...it pushed me for better things and helped me set goals...I love working hard to get better every day." When asked what she enjoyed most about being a student-athlete, Barbara replied, "Just competing. Playing in games...Just being on the field and, you know, putting it all to work. It's that feeling, and I think that's what I've enjoyed most, out of everything."

As competitive individuals, these seven women gained satisfaction from their sports competition, especially during successful seasons for their teams. The participants had all played their sport since they were young, and they took pleasure in working hard

to improve their games during their college careers. Barbara enjoyed the fact that her teammates were “working as hard as you and going towards that same goal.” That teamwork, as well as the spirit of competition, was something that Barbara felt she will miss. “I feel like I’m never gonna have that again,” she said.

Developing important skills. The seven participants also felt that their experiences as intercollegiate student-athletes prepared them to enter the professional world, armed with a variety of skills that they developed or enhanced through their college sports participation. These student-athletes mentioned a number of skills that they gained during their four years in college. These skills included time management, work ethic, responsibility, teamwork, goal-setting, leadership, dedication, attention to detail, interpersonal communication, handling pressure, perseverance, confidence, discipline, motivation, accountability, and the ability to multi-task.

Five participants discussed time management as an important skill that they acquired at the university. The variety of tasks and responsibilities required of these student-athletes forced them to develop time management strategies. Barbara indicated:

The biggest thing is it [being a student-athlete] taught me time management and multi-tasking because, obviously, you know, you’re a full-time student, so you have twelve, fifteen, sixteen credits, and you also have, you know, a four hour practice and weights in the morning and running, and you have all these things to do, and it’s really like a non-stop job.

Specific strategies that the student-athletes used to manage their time are detailed later in this chapter, during exploration of this study’s second research question.

Developing responsibility and accountability emerged as an important skill, as well. Ruby said that her experiences at the school forced her to grow up and become responsible. Tracy suggested that her role as a student-athlete was “almost like a job,” since she had to be on time, take care of certain duties, and be responsible to other people. Barbara claimed that she gets frustrated with irresponsible people, since she became “so used to doing everything on time and doing everything that’s expected” of her. She went on to discuss how being a student-athlete taught her how to be accountable for herself and for her teammates, and to admit when she made a mistake. Barbara felt fortunate that she was able to learn responsibility and accountability through athletics, going on to say:

I wish there were other people that got to experience it, just so they could learn how to do those things in real life. ‘Cause a lot of people think that life is so hard, and they don’t really know, like, how to handle everything, all at once. So, I think that it prepared me for that.

Being a student-athlete helped some of the participants develop skills related to interpersonal communication. Krista explained that she became more confident in her “ability to interact with” a variety of people, as a result of opportunities provided to her by her coaches. Barbara also said that being a student-athlete taught her “how to talk to people.” Carol felt that interacting with teammates from a variety of backgrounds helped prepare her to deal with “different personalities and...different people” in future experiences.

Tracy suggested that the work ethic required of college athletes can help prepare them to be successful in life: “I feel like we all have worked so hard, and you put every

day into that, and it's for, like, one common goal...and later in life, I feel like that's really gonna pay off." She also indicated that she learned how to work within the framework of a team, which "can transfer over to a job." While Tracy had never had a job, because of her sport commitment, she said, "For the most part, I feel like I've acquired that [job-like training] within my athletic experience."

Debbie believed that participation in intercollegiate athletics prepares student-athletes to be successful in their future careers, and that student-athletes "have an upper hand because of the things we experienced." She added, "We have the experience of pressure, with the time management...the working with other people." Debbie viewed these experiences as solid preparation for the professional world. She also mentioned the fact that her team had a number of players who did not make it all the way through what she called "four grueling years" of intercollegiate athletics involvement. The perseverance required of student-athletes to make it through four years, she said, is going to give her "the edge in the real world."

Carol pointed out how the attention to detail that is needed to perfect athletic skills can transfer to other areas of life. "If you put forth your time and your effort in all of these little things," she said, "it kind of teaches you how to strive to be better in every way." This lesson, she believed, went beyond sports: "You're taking all of these little steps, and I feel like you can apply those skills that you've learned in every aspect of your life—in your job, in your...everything, your family."

Participants mentioned other skills that they developed during their time in college. Ruth indicated that participation in college athletics "taught me to be more responsible and goal-directed," while also becoming more independent. Carol also

touched on the importance of goals, when she said, “Setting goals and trying to accomplish them is something that I’m going to use for the rest of my life.” Carol and Tracy spoke of leadership skills that they built during the course of their four years. Barbara believed that being a college athlete “shaped the person that I am and the person that I’m gonna be...I think that it made me a really disciplined person, really motivated.”

The seven participants viewed their experiences as college student-athletes in a favorable manner, suggesting that it helped prepare them to be successful in other aspects of their lives. The lessons they learned through their sports participation included time management, responsibility, accountability, effective communication, strong work ethic, and goal-setting. From their perspective, being a college athlete provided them with a chance to develop and enhance a variety of important skills that can carry over to other areas of their lives.

Research Question #2: How do these student-athletes balance these three aspects (academic, athletic, and social) of their lives?

The level of commitment required to perform effectively as an intercollegiate student-athlete presents these individuals with a variety of tasks and responsibilities, both athletically and academically. The time spent practicing, conditioning, meeting, traveling, and competing sometimes leaves little time for academic chores. Student-athletes may be physically exhausted from their athletic work, which can prevent them from having the energy to focus and complete school work when they do have time for it (Adler & Adler, 1987, 1991; Meyer, 1990; Miller & Kerr, 2002, 2003; Giacobbi et al., 2004).

In this study, the seven participants discussed these issues and described some strategies they employed to help them balance these responsibilities and achieve success

in both the athletic and academic arenas, while also being able to experience a social life. Their responses addressed the second research question in this study, which is “How do these student-athletes balance these three aspects (academic, athletic, and social) of their lives?”

“Time has been, like, a big thing,” said Tracy. “...You don’t have a lot of time.” She continued, “You come home and you’re so tired...then you gotta realize you gotta study...you want to go to sleep, ‘cause you gotta get up and do it all over again.” This forced Tracy to cut back on her schoolwork, which she said hurt her academic performance.

The time and commitment that her sport participation required was “the hardest challenge, mentally” for Ruby, especially in the off-season, when she and her teammates were required to practice and condition, without the motivation of having to prepare for any upcoming games. Barbara explained that when the season began and the team spent time traveling to competitions, she and the team missed a lot of class and had to arrange to make up work or take tests in advance. She said, “My biggest challenge [academically] was trying to stay on top of my grades when I was missing so much class.” Krista’s academic program required her to complete an internship, on top of her class work and athletic responsibilities, which added to an already hectic and busy schedule. Carol stated, “I didn’t run my own life,” as a result of the wide range of responsibilities and activities that her coaches asked of her and the team.

The participants were able to balance their academic and athletic responsibilities in a number of ways. The strategies they used included completing homework right away, prioritizing their schedules, utilizing free time and study hall, scheduling more

difficult classes during the off-season, and taking advantage of the academic commitment of their coaching staffs. These student-athletes credited these strategies with helping them balance their lives and making it through four full years of intercollegiate athletic participation.

Four participants spoke of the need to get class work done as soon as possible, even if it meant doing work at uncomfortable times, in uncomfortable places. Ruth said, “Reading chapters at the airport, or just on the plane, or sitting in the car, you always have to make sure you’re getting it done, if you really want to succeed.” Barbara spent time on academic assignments at times that she “normally wouldn’t do them.” She often remained on campus between class and practice, doing homework, since she knew that “after practice, I wouldn’t really want to...I would just kind of want to hang out.”

Debbie said, “With all the hours I put in, in the gym and on the field, it’s so easy to come home and not do anything for school.” She initially suggested that time management and completing work early were key elements of academic success for student-athletes, but she later revealed, “I get my work done most efficiently when I procrastinate.” Carol, on the other hand, tried to complete her work early and take advantage of any free time she had to do homework. She explained that her strategy involved “balancing my free time and making sure that I put my academics into that free time, instead of just being like, ‘Oh, I finally have some time off from [sport]! I’m just gonna sit here!’”

Some of the participants advised that prioritizing played an important role in their ability to balance. Tracy prioritized by creating a daily schedule. Ruby cherished time spent with her friends, but she took the approach that she had to make time for her sport

and school first. Krista “still experienced the social aspect” of college, but she said, “I always made sure that those things [athletics and academics] were taken care of first, because those are most important to me.” Debbie echoed that sentiment, saying that she knew her sport and her schoolwork “came first, over...my social life.” She added, “I was just so motivated to be the best that I could be, it wasn’t really a problem for me.” When asked what advice she would give to incoming freshmen in her sport, Debbie continued on that theme:

Being an NCAA student-athlete is sacrificing something. And that you should be sacrificing what normal students get to do in college, for your team. And I think that some girls coming into the program don’t understand that. And either they don’t last, or they’re kind of a cancer. And I would try to impress upon them how important it is...that it’s ok to sacrifice a little bit of your social life to be a successful student-athlete, individually, and more importantly, as a team, ‘cause everyone’s gotta be on the same page with that.

During the season, sport participation took a bigger priority than it did in the off-season. Understanding this increased focus on the athletic commitments, Tracy described a strategy her team used to minimize the time conflicts. She said, “We load...our credits and take, like, our harder classes [in the off-season], and then during [season], you...you kind of avoid taking the harder classes, ‘cause of time.” This tactic may have eased her burden during the season.

Many of the participants indicated that their coaches placed an importance on academics that helped them balance their responsibilities. Tracy said that her coaches gave the team enough time away from the sport so that they could focus on academics or

simply relax. Debbie's coaches repeatedly told the team that "academics come first." She said, "We missed practice for academics...we left road trips early for important events...if we had to." Barbara's explanation of her coaches' academic attitudes demonstrated that they assisted their student-athletes in balancing their two roles:

They were very, um, helpful when...when we would tell them, you know, "I have this paper that's due tomorrow, and I really need to work on it." And they would say, "Ok. Well, you know, come to practice for an hour, and then you can take the rest of the day off." Where, you know, if we had a big exam or something like that, they were very understanding, and most of the time, they were willing to work with us to make sure that we were getting that done. Because academics, to them, were always number one, and they were always very clear about that.

If students displayed a poor commitment to academics, the coaches addressed it, through study hall or suspension. Carol recalled her freshmen year, when the coaches suspended a teammate because of her grades: "That kind of, for me, said, 'They're not messing around.' And so I felt as though my coaches gave me that added, 'Ok. You better get your grades.'" Krista said, "There was consequences if you were not going to class, there's consequences if you're not making the grades you should." On the positive side, she added, "Then there's also a little more so you are recognized if you do well in the classroom. You are recognized at banquets and awards ceremonies or through the [conference], and those are incentives." The coaches, then, provided rewards for good performance, in addition to the negative consequences for sub-par performance.

Krista also suggested that study hall was an important requirement during her freshman year that helped set the tone for her, in terms of understanding how to balance

her academics with athletics. She viewed study hall as a valuable resource provided to her and other athletes in the school's athletic department. Krista answered the prompt regarding the advice she would give to incoming freshmen student-athletes by saying:

Making the most of yourself, like deciding to get better and improve yourself because there's so many resources and people and...and...that are wanting that for you and trying to make you, like, you know, be the best that you can be. So you have to work with them and want that for yourself, as well.

Utilizing the various resources, according to Krista, can enhance the ability of student-athletes to balance athletic and academic responsibilities.

Finally, Carol said that she would also advise new student-athletes to find balance in their lives by finding time to socialize, outside of school and sports. "I think it's very important," she said, "to have a balanced life and make sure that you are keeping yourself sane and keeping yourself, um, able to enjoy your career." This, she suggested, could be done by not getting "too caught up in academics and [sport]" and neglecting the social aspect of college life. Carol did not advise that social activity came before school and sports, but she did articulate that it is important to make time for a social life.

Community service responsibilities added to the already busy lives of some of these student-athletes. A couple of the participants revealed that some team members became "overwhelmed" and "frustrated" with the extra time commitment for community service. Barbara pointed out that, despite the "life-changing" nature of the service, "it made it hard because, like I said, we were always behind on schoolwork" and the coaches tended to schedule events on off-days. She added, "When our coach would say, 'Oh, we

don't have practice, but we have to be at this place for five hours,' yeah, that definitely got in the way of doing other things."

Debbie claimed that her coaches allowed team members to skip community service if they had important schoolwork to finish. Krista praised her coaches for breaking up the responsibilities so that the students "didn't feel overwhelmed by it. It was more of a fun thing." When asked whether or not the extra community service made it more difficult for her to balance her responsibilities, Krista replied, "It could have. Like, it took away a little bit of time. But, in the end, it's a bigger reward, I think."

Ruth, the international student, worked a part-time job. None of the other participants worked during the school year. Ruth did not view the job as an extra burden because she "was responsible enough to make sure that it's done." She also felt that the job helped her improve her English skills and increased her comfort in communicating with people.

Participants struggled, at times, to balance their athletic and academic responsibilities, while maintaining a social life. Their work ethics, their abilities to prioritize, and their supportive coaching staffs contributed to the success they experienced in balancing school and sports. These and other strategies they cited helped the seven student-athletes navigate their way through four years of intercollegiate athletics.

Research Question #3: How do these student-athletes define and construct their identities?

The seven participants generally indicated that they held a balanced identity between "student" and "athlete." However, as they discussed the balance, they had a

tendency to slightly favor their athletic identity. Each of the seven participants, though, displayed an ability to relate well to both roles.

Tracy answered that her identity settled “right in the middle, somewhere” between “student” and “athlete.” She called herself “studious,” but added that she was “definitely dedicated” to her sport. As she explained her answer, she described how her sport took up more of her time as her career continued:

I still obviously care about school, but it’s just, it’s harder, I guess, to manage, so it’s kind of you do what you can to get by, ‘cause you feel like you have to do so much with...athletically, that there’s sometimes not enough time for academics.

Barbara also began to describe her ability to view herself as both a serious student and as a serious athlete. Much like Tracy, though, Barbara’s athletic identity eventually predominated to a greater extent than her student identity. She explained:

Not that I didn’t think about school and that I didn’t do homework, but it was [sport]...was, like, what ran my life, so to speak. And it’s like, I’m here in school, too, that I have to keep up with, but it was like most...I felt like most of my time was devoted to [sport] and practice and training and traveling, and...so, I guess I would say I felt more like a [sport] player.

The dedication to their sport, then, compelled Tracy and Barbara to view themselves more as athletes than as students, despite feeling competent and serious about their studies.

Ruth agreed that her balanced identity “definitely” stemmed from her experience and her outlook as an international student. “It’s the fact that I don’t take it for granted, because I do realize where I’ve come from,” she said. “For me, coming here was a big

achievement. It was like a dream come true.” Ruth worked hard in the classroom and in her sport. She even indicated that during her last two years, she “decided to become more...a student.”

Carol felt like she did a “pretty good job of balancing it out” between her athletic and academic identities. “There was one semester where I put [sport] first, and I could sense that my grades slipped a little bit,” she said. “It was my worst semester.” Still, Carol balanced her roles well, aside from that one semester. She attributed part of that balancing academic ability, which did not require her to have to work extra hard to achieve good grades.

In a similar fashion, Ruby always had success as a student, without having to put forth much extra effort, due to her natural academic gifts. In her case, she felt that this allowed her to identify more strongly with athletics:

I think I would put more into [sport]. You know, I was always...I would be more worried about a game, instead of a test. Because I knew the test was fine. The game...I don’t know what’s gonna happen. So, um, I would definitely view myself probably more as a [sport] player.

Still, Ruby admitted that, after her junior season, her focus shifted to her internships and career preparation.

Krista placed importance on academics and possessed fairly balanced identities, but she gave a slight nod to her athletic identity. She explained, “When you’re a part of collegiate athletics, I feel like...you kind of have a spotlight on you, or you’re looked at in a different light.” This spotlight, she suggested, enhanced her athletic identity. “If you’ve had success” she said, “you might be more well-known for your sports success,

rather than your academic success.” Overall, though, Krista believed that she had “emphasized that they’re both important to me, in my life.”

Debbie displayed the strongest athletic identity. Her brothers both competed as Division I athletes, and that influenced her desire to play sports in college: “I went to a lot of their games...I saw how the student-athlete population was treated differently in society...better, almost, in society, and I just wanted to be a part of it.” This background may have influenced her strong athletic identity, despite being a good student. “I was very serious about my academics,” she said, “but...[sport] came first.” As she explained her identity, though, she found that perhaps more balance existed than she had originally indicated:

I guess I just balanced it well enough to be successful, academically, and still have [sport] be my prime motivator, if that makes sense. Like, um...I mean, our coaches were also great with, if class conflicted with practice, you could always go to class...you never got punished for it, so I guess, you know, I guess academics *was* my first priority, in a way, because I always did choose school if there was a conflict, because our coaches wanted us to do it that way. But, um...I was here to play [sport].

Many of the participants indicated a desire for more attention to be placed on women’s sports at the school. Future research should explore whether or not greater recognition for women’s sports would lead female student-athletes to identify more closely with the athlete role.

In general, the participants viewed themselves as both students and athletes. The commitments required in intercollegiate athletic participation, though, compelled most of

them to acknowledge that they saw themselves slightly more as athletes. All seven experienced success in both areas and had positive attitudes towards school and sports.

Summary

The student-athletes in this study experienced a variety of athletic, academic, and social events during their four years in college. Their experiences began during the process of selecting the school. When they arrived on campus, nearly all of the participants felt prepared to handle the academic transition from high school to college. Throughout their time at the university, the participants all developed strong and meaningful personal relationships with teammates, friends, coaches, and staff members. Some even grew to love their interactions with fans.

The athletic scholarship freed the women of some financial stress and allowed them go through college without piling up enormous debt. However, the scholarship also created a job-like feel and added some pressure to perform athletically. Still, the participants suggested that they loved playing their sport and enjoyed the nature of competition. This theme emerged in each interview.

Participants also indicated that they experienced personal growth and maturation as college athletes. They claimed that being a student-athlete taught them to become independent and responsible, as well as how to interact and communicate with people, even people that were different from themselves. Community service opened the eyes of some participants and exposed them to the lives of those less fortunate.

Additional growth and maturation materialized as the student-athletes dealt with negative circumstances. Injuries played an important role in the lives of five of the seven participants. In addition, conflicts occurred between players and coaches over playing

time and general philosophies. In recalling these difficult and frustrating situations, the participants generally displayed an optimistic outlook toward those experiences, indicating that they learned valuable lessons in the process of dealing with the injuries and conflicts.

These seven women felt that their athletic participation also forced them develop a number of skills that would assist them later in life. They cited time management, responsibility, teamwork, goal-setting, interpersonal communication, perseverance, and accountability as a few of the skills that participation in intercollegiate athletics taught them.

The student-athletes in this study balanced a variety of tasks and responsibilities. Their athletic commitments reduced the time and energy available for academic work, but they managed to succeed in both areas by prioritizing their responsibilities, completing homework without procrastinating, and planning their time. The participants viewed their coaching staffs as supportive of academic responsibilities, even to the point of allowing student-athletes to leave practice early in order to complete schoolwork. After taking care of athletic and academic chores, the participants also managed to find some time for social activities, which allowed them to take a break from the pressures of sports and school.

Finally, the student-athletes in this study viewed themselves as both students and athletes. Most suggested that, because of the amount of energy required to participate in intercollegiate athletics, they self-identified slightly more as athletes than as students. Still, these seven women balanced their responsibilities and identities effectively, completing four successful years as intercollegiate student-athletes.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The findings in this study revealed information about female scholarship team sport student-athletes who successfully remained involved in intercollegiate athletics for four years. In particular, it highlighted eight consistent themes related to the academic, athletic, and social experiences of the participants, as well as the strategies the student-athletes employed to balance these three aspects of their lives. It also explored how the seven women defined and constructed their identities.

This study investigated student-athletes' experiences and perceptions of self-identity. The results yielded few surprises, based on a review of existing literature. In general, the findings stayed consistent with previous research on female college athletes.

Student-athletes who successfully balance their athletic and academic responsibilities tend to be those who have a compatible and unified sense of both athletic identity and student identity (Killeya, 2001; Killeya-Jones, 2005). The women in this study used a few different approaches to balance their responsibilities. They viewed themselves as both students and athletes, displaying positive attitudes towards each role. This ability to balance may have helped them make it through four years as college student-athletes. Killeya-Jones (2005) suggests that student-athletes who are able to balance their student identities with their athlete identities generally attain more overall

success in college, are more satisfied with their lives, and experience positive well-being. The student-athletes in this study expressed satisfaction with their lives as college athletes and indicated that they experienced successful careers, both in and out of athletics.

Murphy, Petitpas, and Brewer (1996) described a lack of career maturity in some men's basketball and football players. While a couple of the women in this current study expressed a desire to play their sport professionally, all seven participants spoke of career goals outside of athletic participation. They all seemed to possess mature career goals.

Some research has found that athletic identity may decrease during a student-athlete's final one or two years of college, allowing the student role to increase (Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993; Miller & Kerr, 2002, 2003; Riemer, Beal, & Schroeder, 2000). While two participants in this study indicated that they began to focus more on success in the classroom or in internships during their last year, the student-athletes generally remained consistently balanced in their identities through the entire four years, with a slight advantage to their athletic identity, even as seniors.

Consistent with previous research (Adler & Adler, 1987, 1991; Meyer, 1990; Miller & Kerr, 2002; Miller & Kerr, 2003; Giacobbi et al., 2004), student-athletes in this study suggested that finding enough time for schoolwork represented a major academic challenge. Some mentioned how the physical exhaustion from attending class and practice during the day left them with little or no energy to study at night, which is similar to what Miller and Kerr (2002, 2003) discovered from their interviews with Canadian student-athletes.

Previous research also found that some student-athletes felt that sports taught them skills that could be transferred to academics (Meyer, 1990; Kimball & Freysinger,

2003). Student-athletes in this study also believed that their intercollegiate sports participation helped them develop or enhance important skills that they could use in other areas of their lives. Some of the skills that the participants referred to include time management, responsibility, teamwork, goal-setting, leadership, dedication, attention to detail, interpersonal communication, discipline, motivation, and accountability.

The seven participants in this study displayed high academic orientations, similar to the student-athletes in other studies (Meyer, 1990; Riemer, Beal, & Schroeder, 2000). They entered college prepared for the academic structure of the university, which helped them adjust to college life, unlike the men's basketball players studied by Adler and Adler (1987, 1991). Some Canadian student-athletes also struggled academically early in their college careers (Miller & Kerr, 2002; Miller & Kerr, 2003).

The women in this study, though, all suggested that their grades as freshmen in college remained at the level of their high school grades, with the exception of the study's one international student. These student-athletes felt competent academically, and while they expressed some concern about prejudices that instructors might have against student-athletes (similar to Adler and Adler's (1987) men's basketball players, who felt as though instructors may not have respected their academic abilities), the seven women in this study revealed that they generally received support from their professors and developed positive relationships with them.

Previous research indicated that the pressure on coaches to win may have influenced them to place greater emphasis on sports than on academics (Adler & Adler, 1987, 1991; Fletcher, Benshoff, & Richburg, 2003; Kimball & Freysinger, 2003). The student-athletes in this study, though, suggested that their coaches not only told them that

academics were a priority, but they also followed through on that statement by allowing and even encouraging student-athletes to miss athletic requirements in order to complete schoolwork, at times. The amount of attention the coaches gave to academics seemed much greater in this study than in previous research.

College sports participation felt like a job to student-athletes in the existing literature (Adler & Adler, 1987, 1991; Meyer, 1990; Riemer, Beal, & Schroeder, 2000). The student-athletes who participated in this current research also perceived job-like qualities in their student-athlete status. Female student-athletes in Meyer's (1990) research bemoaned the fact that their sport ruled their lives. This resembles the sentiments of some participants in this study.

Meyer (1990) suggests that the lack of social status and recognition that female athletes receive on campus may hinder athletic identity. Exposure for women's sports has grown over the last eighteen years, but many of the participants in this study felt that women's sports should still receive more attention, especially on campus. Perhaps this would increase female student-athletes' identification with the athlete role, but further research is obviously needed to explore that idea.

Many student-athletes spend their college careers in a state of social isolation, in which the overwhelming majority of their social interactions occur with teammates or other student-athletes (Adler & Adler, 1987, 1991; Meyer, 1990; Riemer, Beal & Schroeder, 2000; Miller & Kerr, 2002, 2003). A couple participants in this study indicated that they had very few non-athlete friends, but most of the women felt that they successfully balanced their personal relationships between athletes and non-athletes.

Social isolation emerged as a prevalent theme in previous research, but it seemed to play a less significant role with these seven women.

Female student-athletes may face stereotypes that suggest they are masculine or homosexual (Meyer, 1990; Veri, 1999). In this study, only two of the seven participants mentioned the lesbian stereotype when asked if they had been stereotyped as a female student-athlete. The participants who mentioned the stereotype said that the stereotyping was never directed at them, personally, and it did not have a significant impact on them.

Implications

This study addressed a gap in the literature by providing a more recent examination of the experiences of female team sport student-athletes. These detailed insights into the lives of student-athletes add to the existing body of knowledge on intercollegiate student-athletes, while also providing professionals who work with student-athletes information regarding the perspectives and attitudes of this select group of people. This knowledge may help professionals in college athletics better understand the experiences and viewpoints of female student-athletes who successfully navigated their college careers.

Administrators, coaches, academic advisors, and other staff members who work with student-athletes can use the results of this study to enhance the experiences of student-athletes. The perspectives of the participants represented in the study provide insight in the lives of female student-athletes. Implications for college sports personnel are discussed in this section.

--*Understand the role of the coaches in college selection:* The participants in this study listed a number of factors that influenced them in their decision to attend the university.

The most powerful reason they gave concerned their comfort level with the coaching staff. It is important for administrators and other staff members to understand this factor and develop a plan that is designed to support student-athletes when a coach leaves the school or is fired. Teams need to retain student-athletes in order to maintain their score on the NCAA's Academic Progress Rate (APR), so it is important that schools are prepared to work with student-athletes and convince them to remain at the school, even if a coaching change takes place.

--*Recruit academically well-prepared students*: Participants in this study did not experience difficulty in the academic transition to college. Their academic transition ease allowed them the time and energy to dedicate to their sport. These student-athletes are likely better equipped to balance their multiple responsibilities and perform well in all aspects of their college careers. Coaches and university athletic departments benefit from recruiting athletes with strong academic abilities in a couple of ways. Academically prepared athletes are able to focus more energy on their sport, without falling behind in school, and these types of student-athletes will not likely hurt a program's APR score.

--*Assign teammates as roommates and require study hall for freshmen*: Participants in this study suggested that support from teammates kept them on track, academically, and that rooming with teammates helped them manage their schedules. One participant credited the first-year study hall requirement with helping her to successfully begin her academic career. Incoming freshmen student-athletes should be assigned to room with teammates, so that they can be on similar schedules and not subjected to any issues similar to Carol's freshman year problem with a non-athlete roommate. Study hall should

be required, and it needs to be monitored in a way that promotes completion of academic work, rather than social visiting or non-academic website browsing.

--Establish and develop personal relationships with the student-athletes: Coaches, administrators, and staff should demonstrate a personal interest in all student-athletes with whom they work. Professionals in college athletics need to show these students that they care about them as people, and not just as athletes who can help them advance their careers. The participants in this study appreciated the personal relationships that they built with coaches, administrators, and other staff members. Additionally, coaches, staff, and student-athletes should be trained in effective conflict resolution skills. Conflicts among coaches, staff, and students negatively impacted the experiences of some of the study participants.

--Provide support for injured student-athletes: Injury was a common occurrence for many of the women in this study. Dealing with injuries frustrated these participants, who all enjoyed competing and playing their sports. If student-athletes must miss playing time because of injuries, coaches should find ways for them to contribute to the team and feel involved. For example, coaches could assign injured players specific duties during games that would be similar to those of an assistant coach. In addition, coaches could work with injured players to develop supportive leadership skills.

--Involve student-athletes in fan promotions: The women in this study felt that their involvement with their team's fans had positive effects on them and their team. Teams should be promoted in ways that allow fans to communicate with the players at clinics, events, or post-game sessions. However, coaches and staff need to be aware of obsessive

fans and establish precautionary measures against inappropriate contact between fans and student-athletes.

--*Encourage student-athletes to become involved in community service:* Participants spoke positively about community service involvement that their teams sponsored. One student even called it a “life-changing experience.” Student-athletes in this study felt that their community service work helped them mature and even enhance their communication skills. Participation in community service events, though, should not be forced on the student-athletes, especially since their athletic and academic responsibilities already require a great deal of time and effort.

--*Show support for the student-athletes’ academic endeavors:* Coaches should demonstrate that academics are a priority by establishing consequences for those who do not pay proper attention to academic responsibilities. One participant discussed how a coach’s decision to release a team member who did not take academics seriously impacted her and provided her with extra motivation to succeed in school. Coaches can also show support for academics by allowing students to miss parts of practice to finish work, if needed, as a couple of participants indicated of their coaches.

--*Encourage student-athletes to utilize the suggested balancing strategies:* Participants in this study experienced academic success by prioritizing their work, studying at uncommon times and in uncommon places, taking advantage of free time to complete homework, and avoiding procrastination. These strategies should be explained to student-athletes and encouraged. One way to present these strategies would be to have senior student-athletes who successfully balanced athletic and academic responsibilities speak to

incoming freshmen at the beginning of the academic year to give them advice on how to be successful student-athletes.

--*Understand and take advantage of athletic identity*: Even these seven participants, who accepted both their student and athlete roles, tended to identify slightly more with their athletic self. They all expressed that they enjoyed playing their sport. With this in mind, athletic suspensions for poor academic performance may persuade struggling student-athletes to work harder academically. Academic staff can also use sports analogies and examples to help student-athletes navigate through some non-athletic difficulties. The participants in this study listed a number of skills that they gained or enhanced by competing as intercollegiate student-athletes, and academic staff should encourage student-athletes to be aware of how their athletic participation can prepare them for future roles and responsibilities.

Limitations

Limitations exist in this research project. First, the sample size is very small. A sample of seven individuals does not represent an entire population. Generalizations cannot be made about all female scholarship team sport student-athletes, based on the experiences of this small group of participants. Qualitative research, however, does not seek to generalize about entire populations. Instead, it is concerned with descriptive data and depth, rather than breadth, of information (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

In addition, two of the seven participants will be able to compete in their sport for one more year, as a result of injuries that forced them to sit out at least one full season. While they discussed their four year careers just like the other participants, their

experiences may be somewhat different, since their athletic careers had not been completed at the time of their interviews.

The participants in this study successfully remained involved in intercollegiate athletics for four years. The experiences of these women may be different from the experiences of student-athletes who do not last four years. This study does not consider the experiences and the challenges of student-athletes who do not complete their athletic eligibility.

This study also did not take into account or explore the experiences of male athletes, individual sport athletes, student-athletes from other NCAA divisions, or student-athletes at universities in different parts of the country. This study replicated and extended Miller and Kerr's (2002) research on Canadian student-athletes to a more specific sample of participants. Similar methods can be used in future research to address the variety that exists in the population of college student-athletes.

Future Research

The broad and diverse population of intercollegiate student-athletes provides ample opportunity for future research to examine the experiences of a wide variety of intercollegiate student-athletes. Replications and extensions of this study and Miller and Kerr's (2002) work can involve men's revenue sport athletes, individual athletes, and athletes at the Division II and III levels. Instead of interviewing senior student-athletes, freshmen student-athletes could be asked to participate in a study that investigates their perspectives at the end of their first year in college. Future studies could also follow student-athletes across their entire college career, which could capture the evolution of

perceptions and experiences over time. This approach could also investigate the experiences of those who quit their sport or drop out of school.

This study excluded transfers and non-scholarship (walk-on) student-athletes. Future research should examine their experiences. Differences existed in the experiences of this study's one international student, and future studies should focus on international student-athletes. Research can also concentrate on specific men's and women's sports, such as wrestling and ice hockey, which are not well-represented in the existing literature.

Future research should also investigate the experiences of female student-athletes who are affected by overzealous fans. Participants in this study touched on some issues with fans that, if they hadn't been handled properly, could have turned into problems for those women and their teams. Future research can focus on the effect of obsessive fans on female student-athletes.

Team ethnographies could also provide valuable data. In addition to conducting interviews, researchers could attend practices, study halls, and other team functions, in order to get a first-hand look at the lives of student-athletes. This methodology could provide richer and more detailed data, and the researcher could compare the participants' perspectives against his or her own observations.

Finally, future research could combine qualitative and quantitative methods. A mixed-methods approach would provide more information and address limitations of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

APPENDIX I

Interview Questions/Prompts

1. Why did you choose to attend [the university]?
2. What motivated you to play your sport at this level?
3. Tell me about your experiences as a student-athlete here at [the university] over the last four years.
4. Do you view yourself more as a student, or more as an athlete? Has this perception changed at all over the course of your four years here?
5. Do you hope to play your sport professionally? Have you ever, in your time as a college athlete, seriously thought you had a chance to play your sport professionally?
6. In general, how did the grades you earned in your first year of college compare to your grades in high school?
7. What have been your biggest challenges or sources of stress, athletically, academically, and socially? How have you coped with those stressful situations?
8. How have you balanced your academic and athletic responsibilities?
9. How has your scholarship affected your ability to balance athletics, academic, and your social life?
10. How often have you socialized with your teammates outside of team functions? How often have you socialized with other student-athletes? How often have you socialized with students who are not athletes?
11. How many of your roommates were teammates or other student-athletes? How many were not?
12. Have you ever experienced stereotyping, as a result of your status as a female athlete?
13. Were professors aware of your status as a student-athlete? If they were aware, did you feel as though that influenced their perceptions of you?
14. How have your coaches helped you academically and socially? What influence have your teammates had on you, academically, athletically, and socially? Other staff?
15. Describe your interactions with fans. Have your experiences with them been positive or negative?
16. How do you feel your experiences as a college athlete have helped prepare you for a career? Have your experiences as a college athlete been negative, in any way, in your career preparation?
17. What have you enjoyed most about your experiences as a student-athlete? What have you enjoyed least? Would you do it again? Why or why not?
18. What could have been done to make your time in college more successful? (Facilitators)
19. What advice would you give to other female athletes about being successful during their college careers?

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Central Michigan University

Thesis Title: The Athletic, Academic, and Social Experiences of Female Intercollegiate Team Sport Student-Athletes.

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