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The Lived Experience of the Collegiate Female Student-Athlete

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Kelsie Ann Patricia Saxe entitled "The Lived Experience of the Collegiate Female Student-Athlete." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Recreation and Sport Management.

Robin Hardin, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

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(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

The Lived Experience of the Collegiate Female Student-Athlete

A Thesis Presented for the
Master of Science
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Kelsie Ann Patricia Saxe
May 2015

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this project to those who have contributed to the cultivation of meaning in my own experiences as a female student-athlete. Ashley Wilson, thank you for your patience and kindness as you helped me transition out of sport. Vandal family, thank you for enriching my life during my four years in Idaho and forever after. To my mom, dad, brother, sister, and sister-in-law—thank you for your support, laughs, group texts, big hugs, positivity and unconditional love.

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Abstract

This study explores the lived experience of the collegiate female student-athlete. This population makes up approximately half of the 463,000 student-athletes competing in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) (Irick, 2013). Previous research has explored the benefits and drawbacks of women's participation in sport and specific experiences within the female student-athlete experience. While research heavily encourages the adolescent girl's participation in sports, there is conflicting research regarding the impact sport has on the experiences of female student-athletes at an elite level. LaFontaine (2007) found that female student-athletes are not thriving in relation to various aspects of holistic wellness. However, McLester, Hardin and Hoppe (2014) found that very few female student-athletes were susceptible to eating disorders and many had high levels of self-esteem and positive body image. Previous literature has explored the experiences of female student-athletes experiencing depression through a phenomenological perspective, however this whole population has not been explored using hermeneutic phenomenology (Jones et al., 2010; LaFontaine, 2007). The purpose of exploring this population through hermeneutic phenomenology is to gain a rich understanding of the experiences of collegiate female student-athletes so that administrators, coaches, and support staff can gain understanding of their experiences to guide their decisions and actions when leading this population. Participants were female student-athletes in their third or fourth year of eligibility at an NCAA, Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) institution. One in-depth, unstructured interview was conducted with each participant. Interviews were unstructured to allow the participant to direct the conversation and discuss aspects of her experience that seem most relevant to share. The transcripts were then analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) in which four themes emerged: *transition blues*,

grinding it out, student-athlete bubble, and passing it on. Subthemes within these themes included: *freshman year blues, senior year blues, injury, people leave, pressure, coaching issues, consuming, overwhelming support, my team, learning, and teaching.* By examining the collegiate female student-athlete's experience, athletic department staff can gain greater understanding of these experiences and better adapt to meet the needs of each student-athlete to enhance the experiences of this population.

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Chapter I: Introduction

There are more than 463,000 student-athletes competing in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and approximately 200,000 of those are women. (Irick, 2013). All of these student-athletes vary among division, subdivision, institution, sport, and scholarship status. Women's collegiate sports have evolved during the past 40 years and women are now competing at a high level in collegiate athletics (Shaffer & Wittes, 2006). The modern experiences of the collegiate female student-athletes are important to the ways that coaches, administrators, support staff, teammates, and parents guide this population.

Many variables impact the way women experience collegiate sport and must be taken into consideration when exploring the lived experience of the collegiate female student-athlete. Research suggests that from a young age, girls are socialized to fit into the social norms associated with being feminine. Boys and girls are taught to "perform gender" (Coakley, 2009, p. 41). Family, school, peers, and extracurricular activities can all impact a child differently. Each of these outlets, among others, have opportunities to shape the social reality that the child forms regarding his or her life (Coakley, 2009). Elementary school is where many girls learn the benefits of being passive rather than rambunctious and pushy. They are rewarded for being near perfect and abiding by all of the rules (Kay & Shipman, 2014). Coakley (2009) stated, "Society serves as a context in which individuals produce, define and reproduce specific family practices" (p. 11). Likewise, sports may be a site where children are creating, maintaining, or changing their social contexts that are deemed appropriate by the social structures of society (Coakley, 2009).

Physical activity and organized sports can positively impact young girls. Self-esteem is one benefit of physical activity among girls that has been extensively researched. Research has

had differing conclusions regarding the direct impact of sports on a girl's self-esteem; however, Shaffer and Wittes (2006) attribute the indirect impact on self-esteem to the differing experiences among girls. The specific research conducted by Shaffer and Wittes (2006) suggested "sports participation appears to foster the self-esteem of girls who enjoy sporting activities because they perceive themselves as benefiting..." (p. 2). Essentially, the available psychosocial benefits of adolescent sport are dependent on the quality and enjoyment of their experience (Shaffer & Wittes, 2006).

Studies have also shown that elite female student-athletes are reaping the benefits of sport such as increased self-esteem and body satisfaction. A study that explored the collegiate female student-athletes susceptibility to eating disorders found that female student-athletes at all division levels were more likely to have high levels of self-esteem and body image (McLester, Hardin & Hoppe, 2014). McLester et al. (2014) stated, "the low number of female athletes who were susceptible to anorexia or bulimia may reflect the normal to high self-esteem levels and body image satisfaction demonstrated by the majority of respondents" (p. 409). Similarly, LaFontaine (2007) explored the wellness of first year female student-athletes and found that female student-athletes scored higher in levels of wellness compared to non-athlete female peers in 11 of 19 categories. The female student-athletes scored lowest in the nutrition, stress management, and total self-direction categories of wellness (LaFontaine, 2007). However, LaFontaine (2009) conducted another study to compare the wellness of female and male student-athletes. The research elicited that female student-athletes scored lower in 14 of 20 wellness behavior categories. Similarly to the previous study, female student-athletes scored lowest in spirituality, stress management, nutrition, and total wellness (LaFontaine, 2009). This

demonstrates that female athletes may experience sport differently and there is a need for in-depth exploration of the experiences of the collegiate female student-athlete.

Although research suggests many positive benefits of physical activity and sport for girls, there are also findings of negative experiences associated with sport. When gauging the experience of elite female athletes, research suggests that these athletes are at an increased risk for developing mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and eating disorders (Brunet, 2010). The National Institute of Mental Health [NIMH] (2011) states that the general population of women is twice as likely to develop depression as men. In addition, eating disorders and substance abuse have been linked to coexist with mental illnesses such as depression (NIMH, 2011). Hudd et al. (2000) examined the effects of stress on college students. Results elicited that 63.8% of women reported stress often, while 36.3% of men experience stress often. Additionally, Storch, Storch, Killiany, and Roberti (2005) researched the psychopathology of male and female intercollegiate athletes in comparison with their non-athlete peers. Results did not suggest that mental health was an issue among female student-athletes, however the female-student athlete did report higher levels of “depressive symptoms, social anxiety, and non-support” than both male student-athletes and non-athletes (p. 94). Therefore, female athletes may be more susceptible to mental health issues, which may affect the ways they experience and derive meaning from sport.

Furthermore, when entering the workforce, research suggests that women lack the confidence to engage the full potential of their competence (Kay & Shipman, 2014). One study gauged male and female college students’ confidence regarding scientific reasoning by asking both groups to rate their scientific ability. Women rated themselves much lower than their male counterparts, however after taking the actual science quiz, their scores were essentially equal

(Kay & Shipman, 2014). As demonstrated, some women lack the assurance and confidence in their own ability, which may inherently affect their experiences.

The aforementioned research can impact the lived experience of the collegiate female student-athlete and needs to be taken into consideration when exploring their holistic lived experience. Although various aspects of the lived experience of the collegiate female student-athlete have been explored, this study will focus on the holistic lived experience.

The following chapter will examine the problem, significance, and the definition of terms used for the purpose of this study.

Statement of the Problem

Many different people contribute to the experiences of collegiate student-athletes ranging from coaches, administrators, academic support staff, nutritionists, sport psychologists, athletic trainers, faculty, parents, and peers. In order to effectively serve the student-athlete population, one must first understand the experience from his or her perspective. One must understand the reality of the experiences to warrant that these experiences align with the educational mission and values of the university and athletic department and are valuable to the student-athlete's growth and development. Approximately two percent of all student-athletes have a professional career in sports following college (NCAA, 2013 September 24). Once these student-athletes graduate and leave the institution, it is important that these experiences are setting or securing a foundation to serve them after their athletic career has concluded.

With men dominating the collegiate athletic department, there is a need to gain understanding of the experiences of the collegiate female student-athlete to better serve this population. The Tucker Center and Alliance of Women Coaches examined the decline of female coaches in the NCAA (LaVoi, 2015). In 1974, women coached approximately 90% of female

athletes (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). Today, women coach approximately 43.4% of female student-athletes and only 2 to 3.5% of men's teams (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014; LaVoi, 2015). Women hold approximately, 22.3% of the intercollegiate athletic director positions (up two percent since 2012), however few are seen at the Division I level, with only 37 total (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). Only four women served as the athletic director of a Division I, Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) institution during the 2012-2013 academic year; this is only 3.3% of all Division I, FBS athletic directors (Lapchick, Farris & Rodriguez, 2012). Additionally, all of the FBS commissioners during the 2012-2013 seasons were white males (Lapchick et al., 2012). Men are also more likely to dominate the athletic training profession at collegiate institutions. Acosta and Carpenter (2014) found that women held 32.4% of the head athletic trainer positions of the institutions that participated in their study. In addition, only 12.1% of sports information directors (SIDs) are female. While strength and conditioning coaches are generally male, approximately 62.9% of Division I, Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) schools has one or more female strength and conditioning coach on staff (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014). Additionally, women are underrepresented in leadership roles such as the University president and the Faculty Athletic Representative (FAR). Women account for approximately 15% of University presidents and 31.7% of FARs. (Lapchick et al., 2012). Overall, Lapchick et al. (2012) found that women hold 17% of campus wide leadership positions. This was a one percent drop from the previous year's study. The lack of women's leadership on both college campuses and within the athletic department further begs the need to examine the experience of the collegiate female student-athlete since this population generally accounts for 50% of the student-athlete population.

Although, there have been studies regarding the lived experiences of student-athletes (Post & Wrisberg, 2012; Jones, A. L., Butryn, T. M., Furst, David M., & Semerjian, T., Z.,

2010). as well as student-athlete wellness, there is still a need to explore the holistic experience of the collegiate female student-athlete.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to explore the lived experience of the collegiate female student-athlete. The lived experience refers to the way researchers can view the perceptions of people in the world they exist within (Kafle, 2001, p. 182). The study will explore the meaning female student-athletes assign to their lived experience as a student-athlete, and how they anticipate this experience will impact their future.

Gaining an understanding of the unique experiences of collegiate female student-athletes will enable future female student-athletes to better prepare for the experience and evaluate their experience more wholly. Coaches, administrators, sports psychology consultants, athletic trainers, and all athletic support staff may assist more appropriately by being more aware and more knowledgeable of the experiences of female student-athletes. This study will seek to build on the existing literature regarding the lived experience of the collegiate female student-athlete and the meaning associated with such experiences by looking at their holistic experiences.

Defining Terms

The following operational definitions will be used for this study.

Female student-athlete: Competes in a NCAA, Division I FBS varsity sport. She is in her third or fourth year of eligibility and has remained at the institution of her initial enrollment.

Lived Experience: The way a person views the world through his or her experiences. Within this study, this refers to the way the participants view and describe their experiences as a collegiate female student-athlete.

Phenomenology: Morales (2013) stated, “phenomenology is a method concerned with the richness of lived experience and is useful for exploring and describing phenomena which have been neglected or completely overlooked” (p. 1293). Phenomenology was the methodology used within the study to explore the lived experience of the collegiate female student-athlete.

Hermeneutic Phenomenology: Giving voice and meaning to the lived experiences of persons through dialogue and interpretation regarding particular phenomena (Sloan & Bowe, 2014). The researcher used hermeneutic phenomenology to make meaning of the participants’ experiences through engaged interviews and continual engagement with the text.

Holism: “a multidimensional approach to health” (Povlsen and Borup, 2011, p. 799-800).

Holism was used as a perspective to explore the holistic lived experience of the collegiate female student-athlete.

Wellness: Wellness is a cohesive approach to functioning that requires the integration of the mind, body, and spirit and orients a being toward their greatest potential (Dunn, 1977). Wellness was used as a foundation to explore the holistic experience of the female student-athlete rather than one aspect of her experience.

Social Wellness: “the movement toward balance and integration of the interaction between the individual, society, and nature” (Roscoe, 2009, p. 218)

Emotional Wellness: “awareness and control of feelings, as well as a realistic, positive, and developmental view of the self, conflict, and life circumstances” (Roscoe, 2009, p. 219).

Intellectual Wellness: “perception of, and motivation for, one’s optimal level of stimulation intellectual activity. The optimal level of activity is achieved by the continual acquisition, use, sharing, and application of knowledge in a creative and critical fashion for the personal growth of the individual and for the betterment of society” (Roscoe, 2009, p. 220).

Physical Wellness: “the active and continuous effort to maintain the optimum level of physical activity and focus on nutrition, as well as self-care and maintaining healthy lifestyle choices.

The definition focuses on an individual moving toward personal potential without comparing her progress with that of others...” (Roscoe, 2009, p. 219).

Spiritual Wellness: “a shared connection or community with others, nature, the universe, and a higher power. Additionally, spiritual wellness is the development of values and a personal belief system” (Roscoe, 2009, p. 221)

Chapter II: Literature Review

Benefits of Sport at All Levels

Organized sport captures much of children's free time outside of school. In 2006-2007, nearly three-quarters of America's youth reported participating in organized sports (Women's Sports Foundation, 2008). Furthermore, over 7 million adolescents participate in interscholastic sport in the United States (National Federation of State High School Associations, n.d.; Women's Sports Foundation, 2008). Women's Sports Foundation (2008) said that there are many benefits for children that participate in sports such as "physical health, emotional health, and social adaption in school" (p. 75). More specifically, sport participation among youth "contributes to general health and body esteem, healthy weight, social relationships, quality of life, and educational achievement" (Women's Sports Foundation, 2008, p. 75).

Bailey (2006) reviewed previous literature regarding the benefits and outcomes of physical education and sport (PES) within the lives of children. Bailey (2006) found five common benefits among the research. These benefits include: physical, lifestyle, affective, social, and cognitive. Bailey (2006) said, "There is evidence that those who have developed a strong foundation in fundamental movement skills are more likely to be active, both during childhood and later in life" (p. 398). Bailey (2006) said many studies "have found that youth activity carries on into later life" (p. 398). Vice versa is also true; those that are inactive as children are more likely to be inactive as adults. Sport participation can also impact the perception and experience of stress, anxiety, and depression. Bailey (2006) found that regular PES could reduce these symptoms. Findlay and Coplan (2008) found similar results. Their study focused on the impact of organized sport among shy children. The study found that organized sport gave the children an opportunity to master specific skills, cultivate self-esteem, and garner

friendships and experiences. These opportunities led to a greater well being among the participants.

PES also has the opportunity to contribute to the inclusion of people from different economic and social backgrounds in “shared interest, offering a sense of belonging to a team or club, providing opportunities for the development of valued capabilities and competencies, and developing social networks, community cohesion, and civic pride” (Bailey, 2006, p. 399).

Children that may normally feel like a loner may find a place within sport that fosters inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness.

Na (2015) conducted a study using phenomenological interviews and qualitative questionnaires that examined the perceptions of parents regarding their children’s’ experiences in physical education and organized sport. This study revealed that parent’s’ perceived and expected both physical education and sport to be a way for children to develop socially, emotionally, physically. Parents perceived organized sport to be more effective than physical education, but this could be because of the investment and involvement parents have in youth sport. Neely and Holt (2014) also conducted a qualitative study with parents of children participating in youth sport. Parents noticed that their children gained “personal, social, and physical benefits” from their participation (p. 255). These benefits included friendship, personal responsibility, teamwork, sportsmanship, and positive self-perceptions among many others.

The benefits of sport extend past childhood into adolescence. High school students have also reaped many positive benefits of sport. Steiner, McQuivey, Pavelski, Pitts, and Kraemer (2000) explored the risk and benefits of sport participation among high school students. The study indicated, “sports participation is associated with self-reported lower total risk scores, mental and physical health benefits, and an increased risk of injury” (Steiner et al., 2000, p. 161).

Although both genders experienced benefits, female participants reported more mental health problems, eating and dietary problems, and general health problems. These results made Steiner et al. (2000) wonder, are there significant differences between the experiences of sport participation among genders, or are females just more likely to self-report? Adolescence is a critical time in the development of the female's self-perceptions; often times when a young girl enters puberty, the changes she experiences may negatively affect her self-perception (Ferrence & Muth, 2004). During these times, many girls may choose to disengage from exercise and/or organized sport; Ferrence and Muth (2004) found that when young girls engage in sport during these times, it improves their global sense of self. Additionally, engagement in both informal exercise and team sports can benefit girls more than increasing physical self-perception. Ferrence and Muth (2004) found that self-perception increased in the social, scholastic, and global self-worth categories. This study demonstrated the strength of sport to influence the lives of adolescent girls and boys if they choose to engage.

Collegiate sport participation offers benefits as well. At the intercollegiate sport level, The NCAA boasts 11 benefits of participating in college athletics. These benefits include: college education, academic success, scholarships, student assistance fund, elite training opportunities, academic and support services, healthy living, medical care, medical insurance, exposure and experiences, and preparation for life (NCAA, 2013). Verner et al. (2010) conducted a study that explored the relationship between stress experiences among female elite athletes and female non-athletes. The study measured the cortisol of both groups before, during, and after an intelligence test. Although both groups had elevated cortisol prior to taking the intelligence test, the results indicated that the elite female athletes had lower levels of cortisol at all three points than the non-athletes (p. 64). This study used a stressor outside of sport and the

results indicated that the training of mind and body practiced through sport was utilized within this setting aided them in managing stress during the intelligence test. This study helps illustrate the benefits of sport among elite athletes. There is limited research exploring the holistic experiences of the student-athlete.

The Female Student-Athlete

While many researchers acknowledge the benefits of sport participation, many acknowledge that girls and women may experience sport differently than others. It is clear that benefits exist at every level of participation spanning physical education, youth sport, high school sport, and intercollegiate sport. When looking at elite sport particularly, it is evident that women may be having different experiences than others and than they did previously.

Collegiate student-athletes are a unique population with many unique stressors. Some of these stressors include additional time demands (Beauchemin, 2014), physical demands, overtraining, sleep deprivation, injury, team travel, and campus isolation among others (Etzel, Watson, Visek, & Maniar, 2006). If not handled appropriately, these stressors can lead to the student-athlete compromising their wellness (Beauchemin, 2014; Etzel et al., 2006).

Additionally, those that experience high-levels of stress, athletes and non-athletes alike, are more likely to engage in bad health habits (Hudd et al., 2000). Hudd et al. (2000) found that female college students are significantly more likely to experience stress than their male counterparts, which may translate into bad health habits for the female college student population, including the female student-athlete.

One concern for the female student-athlete at every level is the development of an eating disorder, or disordered eating. Eating disorders, a mental health disorder, affect young women at a greater rate than any other population (Brunet, 2010). Furthermore, female athletes report

higher incidences for disordered eating and lower self-esteem than male athletes (Brunet, 2010). Female athletes are more likely to abuse substances to lose weight (Brunet, 2010; Haupt, 1993). Not only are female athletes worried about increasing their physical appearance, they are worried about raising their athletic performance. Athletic performance has been one of the reasons female athletes engage in weight control behaviors such as vomiting, taking laxatives and diet pills (Haupt, 1993). Although, McLester et al. (2014) found that few female athletes are susceptible to eating disorders throughout the study conducted, there is reason to believe that female student-athletes are more susceptible than male counterparts based on the general population of women.

Furthermore, the general college-aged population experience depression at a higher rate than the general population and women are twice as likely to experience depression as men (National Institute of Mental Health [NIMH], 2009b). Student-athletes are considered an at-risk population for experiencing depression. In part, this may be due to the stressors mentioned. Another contributor could be that athlete's under-use of mental health services (Etzel et al., 2006).

Although athletes may be at an increased risk, research also shows that the majority of elite athletes are not experiencing depressive symptoms or decreased self-esteem. Armstrong and Oomen-Early (2009), conducted a study to explore the differences in athletes and non-athletes regarding social connectedness, self-esteem, and depression. The study elicited statistically significant results between non-athletes and athletes gauging levels of self-esteem, social connectedness and depression. Athletes outscored the non-athlete in all three areas (Armstrong & Oomen-Early, 2009).

Tiffany Clay, a highly recruited swimmer for the University of Tennessee is an example of an athlete whose stressors began to morph her student-athlete experience. Clay began to feel overwhelmed when transitioning into college life. What she expected had not come to fruition. She was overwhelmed, depressed, struggled sleeping, and engaging in unhealthy substance abuse behaviors (Gardiner, 2006). Jenny Moshak, the assistant athletic director for sports medicine for Tennessee said, “They’re (student-athletes) supposed to be poster children, but these young women are facing so many issues that people don’t realize” (Gardiner, 2006, para. 5). Fortunately, Clay’s coach was observant and sent her to work with the clinical social worker on staff; Clay was able to work with the proactive team of health providers at her institution and continue to compete in athletics at a high level for the next three years (Gardiner, 2006).

Although not all elite athletes will react similarly to the unique stressors, most all people, including athletes, face adversity in their lives and many times throughout their career in sport. One qualitative study explored the adversity facing elite female athletes and the potential for growth it may provide. Within the study conducted, Tamminen, Holt, and Neely (2013) found that the athletes faced stressors such as injury, eating disorders, sexual abuse, bullying, and coaching conflicts, yet experienced growth from these. After conducting interviews with the elite athletes, results elicited that the athletes found meaning in their experiences. Tamminen et al. (2013) concluded:

Athletes did not perceive growth through their experiences of adversity per se, but rather they perceived growth to occur when they found meaning related to the role of sport in their lives and the importance of social support through their adversity.

(p. 34)

Another study, conducted by Burton, VanHeest, Rallis, and Reis (2006) explored the lived experience of US female Olympians and their talent development. Burton et al. (2006) stated:

These participants faced significant challenges while developing their talent to reach the Olympic level. Following participation, they were faced with the challenges of making meaning of what those developmental experiences had taught them, and how those experiences contributed to their continued development as human beings. (p. 135)

At first, many participants believed that reaching Olympic level and medaling would provide them with validation. However, many of the participants did not receive a medal, and in this adversarial experience, they found the most meaning and significance (Burton et al., 2013).

Wellness

There is debate among researchers on the exact definition of wellness and the number and certain aspects contained therein. However, many researchers agree, “wellness is a multidimensional, synergistic construct that is represented on a continuum not as an end state” (Roscoe, 2009, p. 216). Therefore, wellness is not described as either well or ill. Rather, wellness is continuous and can contain gray area therein.

Dunn (1977) defined wellness as “an integrated method of functioning, which is oriented toward maximizing the potential of which the individual is capable. It requires that the individual maintain a continuum of balance and purposeful direction within the environment where (s)he is functioning.” This definition will be used for the purpose of this study.

Many researchers cite different aspects of wellness; however, no matter the model used, wellness is referred to as an integration of the dimensions while high-level wellness is referred to as a balance among the dimensions. Many researchers agree that wellness is about balance or “dynamic equilibrium.” Because many of the models and theories describe wellness as a

movement and balance, researchers acknowledge that wellness may be partially based on one's self-responsibility (Roscoe, 2009).

The different aspects of wellness, which will be used for this study, include: social, emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual. Many different scholars commonly refer to these dimensions of wellness while few also acknowledge occupational and environmental wellness as dimensions (Roscoe, 2009).

Social wellness provides one with interconnected and harmonistic living with others and the environment. For example, one who is socially well would be able to effectively communicate and balance one's "self with others, the community, and nature" (Roscoe, 2009, p. 218). Renger et al. (2000) defined social wellness "as the extent to which one gets along well with others and is comfortable with expressing and willing to express one's feelings, needs, and opinions. In Renger et al.'s (2000) concept of social wellness, "support, fulfilling relationships (including sexual relations), and intimacy are central concepts in this model." Many researchers also recognized altruism and being involved in the greater community as a part of social wellness.

Emotional wellness is when one can express and manage a wide range of emotions regarding one's self and others (Roscoe, 2009, p. 219). Emotional wellness is a complex dimension, and many researchers include the following in their outlook on emotional wellness:

- "Positive view of the self, world, and relationships" (Roscoe, 2009, p. 219)
- "Positive self-esteem" (Roscoe, 2009, p. 219)
- "Experiencing satisfaction, interest, and enjoyment in life, as well as having a positive anticipation of the future, or having an optimistic outlook" (Roscoe, 2009, p. 219)
- The ability to cope with stress (Roscoe, 2009)

Physical wellness is generally defined as "active and continuous effort to maintain the optimum level of physical activity and focus on nutrition, as well as self-care and maintaining

healthy lifestyle choices” (Roscoe, 2009, p. 219). The healthy lifestyle choices can include abstinence from drugs and excessive use of alcohol, safe sex practices, and seeking medical services when necessary. Physical wellness also includes the acceptance of one’s physical state while also moving toward one’s personal potential while allowing for circumstances (Roscoe, 2009, p. 219). This may be especially challenging when an athlete faces an injury.

Roscoe (2009) summed up researchers definitions of intellectual wellness, as “...Continual acquisition, use, sharing, and application of knowledge in a creative and critical fashion for the personal growth of the individual and betterment of society” (p. 220). Different aspects of intellectual wellness include:

- Developing cultural knowledge
- Using resources to improve oneself
- Traveling
- Sharing knowledge
- “Mental challenges and critical reasoning” (Adams et al., 1997)

Spiritual wellness, although defined differently by many scholars, can be defined as the process of exploring and finding purpose within one’s life in relation to others, the universe, nature, and a higher power. Some scholars also include the creation of personal values and beliefs in spiritual wellness. When one is spiritually well, there is integration between the mind, body, and a willingness to help others (Roscoe, 2009).

These five aspects of wellness combine to offer a holistic approach to the well being of a person, or student-athlete. Berg and Sarvimaki (2003) stated, “The core of health is integration. The opposite of health is not disease but rather ill-health or health-deficit that is caused by lack of integration” (p. 388). Holism is frequently referenced in the health and nursing industry. Berg and Sarvimaki (2003) said, “the holistic-existential approach in nursing points out that the focus of nursing is on how the individuals experience their existence, give meaning to their life-

experiences and how they are capable of being autonomous in concrete situations” (p. 389).

Although commonly used in the field of nursing, holistic wellness can extend past this field into the lives of student-athletes. In order to explore the true lived experience of the collegiate female student-athlete, one must view more than her experience athletically.

In addition to the studies establishing wellness theory, there have been studies focused on wellness and the student-athlete. LaFontaine (2009) examined student-athlete wellness between genders. The purpose for exploring student-athlete wellness is because the student-athlete’s wellness “is important to their growth and development, and will equip them with skills and attitudes to live a happy and healthy life” (LaFontaine, 2009, p. 2). The researcher theorized that tackling the wellness challenges athletes are faced with can lead to a more beneficial student-athlete experience both athletically and in totality (LaFontaine, 2009, p. 3). Previous research regarding student-athletes and wellness, although limited, suggest that research needs to hone in on the many different aspects of an athlete’s life. LaFontaine (2009) states that “...numerous wellness behaviors undoubtedly influence training, competitive focus, and performance” (p. 3).

LaFontaine (2009) performed a study using quantitative methods to collect data regarding the wellness of both the male and female collegiate student-athlete. The results indicated that there were three statistically significant areas between male and females—all of which the female athletes scored lower than the males. These included: sense of worth, stress management, and leisure (LaFontaine, 2009, p. 5). Additionally, female athletes had lower mean scores than the male athletes on 14 of the 20 wellness-behavior categories (LaFontaine, 2009, p. 5).

LaFontaine found the implications of the study was for athletic support staff to address the needs of the female student-athlete and recognize, educate, and empower the women to reap the benefits of sport.

The Lived Experience

Phenomenology, a philosophy and method of research, is the basis of the lived experience (Finlay, 2009). Phenomenology strives to uncover the reality of human experience as it is lived through the consciousness of a particular person (Sloan & Bowe, 2013). The philosopher, Edmund Husserl, 1859-1938, was referred to many times as the father of phenomenology. Husserl “viewed consciousness as a co-constituted dialogue between a person and the world” (Lavery, 2003, p. 5) in which consciousness could be grasped through intentional process rather than a mechanic instrument (Guthrie & Castelnovo, 1994). In addition, phenomenology has been described as “the study of being in the world of human-beings” (Edwards & Skinner, 2009, p. 375). Finlay (2009) states, “the central concern of phenomenological research is a return to embodied, experiential meaning, to seek fresh, complex, vivid descriptions of a ‘phenomenon’ (a human experience in all its complexity) as it is concretely lived” (p. 474). Phenomenology requires the researcher to take words and descriptions and seek the core of the experience to reveal the essence of the experience (Sadala & Adorno, 2002). Through this process, researchers can derive meaning from the lived experience.

This research acknowledges that many braches of phenomenology exist; however, this study will utilize hermeneutic phenomenology. Hermeneutic phenomenology seeks to “describe, understand and interpret participants’ experiences” (Tuohy et al., 2013, p. 18). Therefore,

throughout this study, the researcher will interpret the text and words of the participants to make meaning of their experiences.

Phenomenology spans many different fields, including the study of sport. To better understand the process of phenomenology and the lived experience, it is important to explore research extending past female athletes.

Gearity and Murray (2011) explored collegiate, semi-professional and professional athletes' experiences and associated psychological effects of unfortunate coaching. Both men and women were included in the study. The study used existential phenomenology and began the unstructured interviews with one question, "tell me about a specific time you experienced poor coaching" (p. 215). The researchers were then able to probe all responses based on the answer of this question. The interviews and analysis elicited five themes including: "poor teaching by the coach, uncaring, unfair, inhibiting athlete's mental skills, and athlete coping" (p. 215). Gearity and Murray (2011) said, "this study highlights the strength of a phenomenological approach to understand athletes' lived experiences" (p. 220). This offers insight into the methodological strength employed for the current study. The researchers also suggested that future research explore the meanings that athletes and coaches construct based on their experience with sport (Gearity & Murray, 2011).

Guenther, Stiles, and Champion (2012) explored the lived experience of those with ovarian cancer. The participants in this study included 11 women who had been diagnosed with ovarian cancer within the past five years, were older than 20, and were willing to talk about their experiences. The methods were based in Heideggerian hermeneutics while using semi-structured interviews (Guenther et al., 2012). During the interviews, the lead researcher, kept questions open-ended and lead with one broad question regarding the participants' experiences shortly

before their diagnosis. Throughout the remainder of the interview probing questions were used to extract the participants' perceptions regarding life both pre and post-diagnosis (Guenther et al., 2012). After collecting and transcribing all the data, the research team went through seven stages of hermeneutic analysis. Through this analysis, five themes emerged including: "the revelation, jeopardy, on the lookout, becoming normal, and living every moment" (Guenther et al., 2012, p.597). Additionally, the study allowed the participants to discuss the experience and process of being diagnosed—many of the participants experienced being misdiagnosed with ailments such as irritable bowel syndrome, urinary tract infection, and constipation, before receiving their diagnosis of ovarian cancer (Guenther et al., 2012). The information regarding the lived experience of diagnosis, can contribute to the early diagnosis of others in the future. Guenther et al. (2012) said:

These women described tenacity and strength in the presence of a bleak diagnosis impacting their immediate future. Despite the high mortality rate, the women applied meaning to their experiences by seeking further knowledge, sharing their experience with other women, and persevering through many challenges. (p. 603)

Although this study is outside the scope of sport, it provides insight into the quality and depth of information a hermeneutic phenomenological study can provide. In addition, this study sought to explore the experience of ovarian cancer patients throughout a continuum of time and experience, similar to the present study.

Few studies have explored the lived experience of the collegiate female student-athlete. Burton et al. (2006) conducted a study, which explored the lived experience of talent development among female Olympians in the United States. While Jones et al. (2010) explored the lived experience of female collegiate athletes suffering from depression. Post and Wrisberg

(2012) explored the lived experience of imagery in female collegiate gymnasts. None of these studies have explored the lived experience of the female student-athlete throughout her collegiate career.

It is critical to remember that each experience will be different when exploring the lived experience of the female student-athlete. Burton et al. (2006) said, “each athlete has a unique story to tell, and a unique set of circumstances to convey when reflecting back on individual journeys” (p. 124). The experiences of the athletes participating in the study will be personal to them, yet may have thematic similarities, through which the researcher will seek to derive meaning.

Chapter III: Methodology

Methods

The nature of this research demanded for qualitative methods. Qualitative methods are suited to elicit the meaning and nature of a given experience (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This study utilized hermeneutic phenomenology, an interpretive type of phenomenology. Smith and Osborn (2008) stated that, “the aim of interpretive phenomenological analysis is to explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world” (p. 53). This method of gathering data was chosen to create depth of exploration and reflection with each student-athlete that was interviewed. Open-ended interviews provided a guide for the interview and allowed for flexibility based on the participant’s experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Each interview began with the question, “Can you tell me about your experience as a student-athlete at the University of (institution)?” This type of interview method is more suited to interpretive phenomenology and allows the participant more opportunity to tell her own story rather than adapting her story to a more structured method of interview (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Bracketing Interview

The researcher engaged in a bracketing interview before interviewing any of the participants (see Figure 1.1 in Appendix C). A bracketing interview is particularly important when conducting a study using phenomenological methods. Beck (1994) stated, “bracketing involves a researcher exposing his/her presuppositions about the phenomenon under study, making them appear so that the researcher can deliberately abstain from them” (p. 500). A fellow graduate student conducted the bracketing interview in which the researcher answered the question that will be asked of participants with probing based on experiences. The two then switched roles and the researcher asked those questions and practiced responding to the answers

with no reaction or confirmation. The interview served to disseminate any bias the researcher has before engaging with participants in order to see the phenomena clearly as the participant describes (Laverty, 2003, p. 6). The themes of the researcher's bracketing interview included pride, coach/athlete relationship, adversity, and exhausted. This can help display the biases of the researcher going into the interview. In order to deal with these biases, the researcher sought to be fully in the moment with the participant and only probe based on what they brought up in the interview.

Positionality Statement

The researcher acknowledges that some circumstances within her life, shape her perceptions and interpretations of her world and this study. Although she engaged in a bracketing interview, it is hard to completely bracket out previous experiences and biases. Positionality is particularly important to recognize within studies where the researcher will be actively engaging with and interpreting the data. Shaw (2010) noted, "Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) recognizes the significance of the researcher's presuppositions and that they can both hinder and enhance the interpretation of another's lived experience" (p. 235).

Sport participation has played a large role in the life of the researcher. She grew up in a middle-class Caucasian family. Sport was a family thing—it was encouraged and accepted by her parents and siblings. Her parents supported her sport participation both financially and socially. As she entered middle school, sport took more of a priority in her life. Sport was something that she felt validated her and provided her with purpose and value. She knew she wanted to be a collegiate student-athlete for many different reasons, including those aforementioned. Starting in about eighth grade, she continually spent her free time exploring her

options for college and dreaming about the possibilities. She began investing more of her time, energy, and parent's money into the sport—hoping to earn a scholarship.

During her senior year of high school, she committed to the University of Idaho on a full swimming scholarship. The researcher acknowledges that her experiences impact the way she views the student-athlete experience. Her experiences, also allow her the opportunity to fully engage with the life world of her participants as they describe their experiences since she was once in a similar situation.

As a current graduate student and former student-athlete performing these interviews, she was able to connect with the participants as a peer. She did not tell any of her participants about her background as a female student-athlete, however being around the same age and a student, she felt as though she was able to relate to each participant as a peer and eliminate potential barriers during the interviews.

Sample

The study focused on collegiate female student-athletes in their third and fourth-year of eligibility while competing in a NCAA Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) institution. Female student-athletes from a variety of sports and backgrounds were sought. The study targeted student-athletes that have remained at the same institution for all four years rather than student-athletes who have transferred from another four-year institution where she previously competed. The study employed purposive sampling to ensure that participants are relevant to the phenomena being studied and fit within the criteria described. Purposive sampling is the act of seeking participants that fit specified criteria required for participation in the study. The researcher sought participants by finding female, student-athletes who fit the criteria based on the information provided on the institution's athletic website. The researcher then contacted the

coaches, directors of operations, graduate assistants, staff, administrators, and athletes of those particular teams.

Procedures

This study was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and received approval through the University of Tennessee IRB (see Appendix A). All participants signed an informed consent form before engaging in the interview (see Appendix E). All interviews were audio-recorded and then transcribed verbatim by the researcher. The transcripts were then sent back to each participant for member checking. Member checking allows participants to make any changes they feel necessary to their transcript. This ensures that each participant is represented accurately and provides the researcher with the most credible data to then analyze. Each interview lasted approximately an hour and occurred in a quiet, safe, public location. The location was generally suggested and reserved by the researcher. However, two participants suggested a location that was more convenient for them and in both instances the interview took place in that location. Interpretive phenomenology studies vary in the number of participants; however, it is not uncommon to limit the sample to a small number to ensure that each case is interpreted richly (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Interviews were conducted until saturation was reached.

Analysis

The data was analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Kafle (2011) stated:

IPA methodology is concerned with individuals' perceptions of events, and the process of understanding individuals' perceptions involves a 'double hermeneutic' whereby the

participant is trying to make sense of their personal and social world and the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant making sense of their world. (p. 30)

Additionally, Polkinghorne (1983) described the interpretive process “as concentrating on historical meanings of experience and their development and cumulative effects on individual and social levels” (p. 9). However, not all meanings will be readily available. The researcher must take an active role in creating meaning of the experiences shared through the interviews. Smith and Osborne (2008) stated, “these must be obtained through a sustained engagement with the text and a process of interpretation” (p. 66).

The researcher read each transcript thoroughly before any coding occurred. The second time through, each case was coded independently using descriptive coding and the codes were then clustered into themes. The researcher then read through each transcript a third time and coded using a different color to make sure that themes were not missed in any participants’ transcript. Descriptive coding was employed to help facilitate the interpretation of each transcript. Once themes emerged from one case, the researcher then began reading and coding another participant’s transcript. After the researcher coded and elicited themes from each transcript, they were compared for opposing or supporting themes throughout the sample.

A number of studies have employed interpretative phenomenological analysis. Jones and Huws (2015) sought to understand those with autism and their perceptions of autism. Additionally, Staf and Almqvist (2015) used IPA as a method of analysis when conducting research on the experiences of children who have witnessed intimate partner violence against their mother. The study sought to understand how these children relate to the father. Furthermore, Park, Lavalley, and Tod (2014) conducted a study to explore the experiences of

elite Korean tennis players' through transition. These studies have employed IPA as methods of analysis to interpret the text, yet also stay within the text and stories of the participants.

Chapter IV: Results

Demographics

Ten collegiate female student-athletes participated in the study and represented every sport within one Division I FBS institution in the southeast region of the United States. Demographics were collected from each participant in a pen and paper form at the beginning or end of each interview. The participants ranged in age from 20-22 with the mean age being 21.3. Participants engaged in a variety of sports including tennis, volleyball, soccer, swimming (two participants), basketball, softball, golf, track and field, and rowing. Each sport at the institution was represented in the study. Eight of the participants were in their fourth year of eligibility, one redshirted her senior year due to injury and is now entering her final year, and one participant was in her fourth year of eligibility for her indoor season and third year of eligibility for her outdoor season. There were two international participants, three were local to the state of the institution, and five traveled domestically to attend the institution. Seven participants classified her race/ethnicity as Caucasian, one participant considered herself black, another African American, and one Hispanic. Each participant chose her pseudonym for the purpose of this study in order to ensure confidentiality. See Table 1.1 in Appendix B for the full demographic table.

Themes

Four themes surfaced from the study and many subthemes emerged within these themes. These themes help convey the lived experience of the collegiate female student-athlete at a FBS, Division I institution in the southeast region of the United States. The emerging themes were: *transition blues*, *grinding it out*, *student-athlete bubble*, and *passing it on*. See Table 1.2 in Appendix B for a full layout of themes and subthemes.

Transition Blues

Transition blues refers to the surfacing of emotions that accompanied the transitions of collegiate female student-athletes. The primary times that this occurred was when the student-athlete entered the institution and when they were transitioning out of sport and preparing to move on. During freshman year blues many times included a role shift as well as the desire to prove oneself as a contributing member of the team. The senior year blues included a preparation for a role and lifestyle shift.

Freshman Year Blues

Freshman Year Blues represents the vivid memory and defining aspects freshman year had on the experiences of the participants. Nine of the participants referenced her freshman year in some respect when describing her student-athlete experience. While many of the experiences encompassed struggle within this year, freshman year was also a time where the participants learned from teammates, particularly seniors, and felt as though they needed to prove themselves.

Nine of the participants referenced some type of struggle in relation to her freshman year. Many of the participants struggled for varying reasons, but the struggle was prominent. The participants referenced the feelings of wanting to go home, transfer, and quit sport, and feeling as though they were no longer the “star” of the team. Emma said, "I really struggled in class that fall semester my freshman year. I kinda felt like no one was helping me. Like I felt like I was drowning and no one was reaching out because there's so many issues on our team that year." Liz struggled with freshman year as well. She said:

I called my mom several times and was like I hate it here like I don't want to be here. I didn't like it and the one thing that I do remember is that I wanted to transfer my freshman year.... Freshman year was definitely a struggle.

It seemed as though many of the participants felt as though they wanted to quit, wanted to go home, and college wasn't quite what they had expected.

Monica said:

I was a very, very, very homesick. They tagged me as one of the most homesick (team mascot's) ever. So I think that was a very tough and difficult transition...I was miserable everyday. My teammates thought that like on every break that I just wasn't coming back. My coaches would call me all the time, are you coming back to school, are you coming back to school? I just got depressed; I suffered, dealt with a few injuries at the beginning of my freshman year, which is very tough.

Rachel faced significant struggle throughout her transition to college. She came in mid-year and needed surgery upon arriving. Additionally, she never took a recruiting trip—so this was her first time to the institution and meeting her teammates. Although she tried, she couldn't hold back the tears when describing her experience her freshman year. She acknowledged that she feels more comfortable as a senior, however the pain of her freshman year was evident. Rachel said, "But my um, my family and friends at home were really—that was my support system cause that was (deep breath) I felt like I was gonna um I wanted to stop." In instances like these, the participants clearly felt very vulnerable. The researcher tried to acknowledge that these were sensitive topics and let the participant decide where the limit was within those topics. Shawn faced a similar situation to Rachel—she also came in mid-year. She felt as though the team was done making friends when she arrived and her role was left undefined. Shawn said, "I thought it

was gonna be the best thing to transfer. That was my first semester here I guess. I really, really struggled.” Not only did the participants face the desire to transfer and quit, they also mentioned the aspect of coming into a prominent program and obtaining a smaller role on the team than they held previously in high school and on club teams.

Emma said:

...I mean my freshman year like obviously that’s a hard transition coming from like high school and being like one of the best players in the gym to coming to a place where its all the top players in the gym all together at once.

Similarly Liz stated:

So that’s frustrating and like I don’t know when you don’t recognize yourself as a player like I feel like you go from high school and you’re the star. I mean everyone that comes to a DI program is a star in their high school...

Additionally, Rachel said, “...I was a big fish in a small pond to being a small fish in a huge pond.”

Many of the participants opened up about their struggle(s) during freshman year, which were similar in the aspect that they wanted to quit, transfer, and run home, yet they didn’t. Many followed up their statements of struggle, with times of triumph to prove, it seemed, that they had overcome this struggle. Emma Clink said, “It’s definitely harder than that (simply doing sports and taking classes), but I definitely think I made the right choice. I’ve had a great time here.”

Similarly, when Shawn explained her struggles her freshman year, she said that she and her family can laugh about it now—the reward was greater than the struggle. However, some participants such as Rachel still had emotional attachments to the hard times.

Senior Year Blues

Many participants addressed the idea of their personal experience of transitioning out of sport as well as the transition of the team as they move on. Three participants addressed pursuing sport professionally, while the others will transition into life outside of sport. Anna said:

...It's been a good four years so it's just sad that it's all of a sudden going to be gone and it's kind of weird to think about; the team is just going to move on. I mean after last year, I mean we still like we're still pretty close with last years seniors, but I mean its not like they're just not apart of it anymore and the team moves on and you're like man. It just (laughs) it really just ends after that.

Being an only senior, Emma, has struggled to hear the team talk about next year. When discussing next year Emma said:

Well next year we're going to win SEC championships and go to NCAA. We're going to go to the final four. I'm pretty sick of hearing that. So, that's been the hardest part I think, of being the only senior. Is hearing how great everything's going to be next year when I have no part in that.

Additionally, Emma discussed the experience of moving on from life as a student-athlete and the uncertainties she has with that experience. Emma said:

I've always had like a pretty much set group of friends to fall into. And I've had that that I was able to like fall back on and be comfortable with like oh well I'm going to have practice or whatever so I didn't always feel like I don't know. I always felt like comfortable, like I knew what was going to happen. I know what next spring is going to be like. I know what next fall is going to be like. Because it's going to be the same as it was last year. And I don't have that so it's a little bit weird.

When discussing moving forward, Shawn said:

I mean its nerve wracking; it's kind of sad. I don't want to leave. I mean it's in terms of like I love competing for this University and I love competing for the team. It's something that, it's become apart of me. But at the same time it excites me in a sense that I know that its prepared me well for I guess the next chapter and I'm excited for you know competing in the next phase.

Additionally, Monica discussed the idea of moving into the real world and taking the next step.

Monica said, "...Its kinda bitter sweet feeling now cause like I'm ready to get involved in the real world but also going to miss kind of the atmosphere and the experience that I had here..."

The general sense about moving on was the sadness associated with leaving something that they have invested so much time, energy and identity into as well as the uncertainty the future brings, especially for those not pursuing sport professionally.

Grinding It Out

Many of the participants referred to some aspect of their experience as a "grind." The researcher connected this statement to the numerous adversities that saturated the experiences of the participants in different ways. The participants were faced with the obstacle of overcoming these challenges and continuing their experience. The experiences were saturated with adversity, but the adversity generally ignited triumph. Grind means, "to wear, smooth, or sharpen by abrasion or friction." This definition helps illustrate the meaning elicited within the grind. The subthemes of grinding it out include: *injury, people leave, pressure, and coaching issues.*

Injury

Seven participants described being injured at some point throughout her student-athlete experience. However, with many, the injury wasn't necessarily the hardest part to overcome—it

was the isolation, the fear, and the emotions that accompanied the injury. Alex injured her back and after questioning if she would ever play (sport) again, she ended up having surgery and coming back from the injury. She described her experience as being both tough and scary. Alex said:

I think that if before this has happened, I had, if they would have understood me a little bit better maybe they could have said hey slow down... Ya know they say give your all for (institution). And ya know that's really what I was doing.

Emma dislocated her finger during preseason. She said, "I felt like my coach kind of just was brushing me off to the side. Which is understandable I mean there's five other girls that play my position that are there and able to get better..." Although she understood the reason, it was clear that this feeling also brought up pain—it seemed as though she didn't feel important any more now that she couldn't contribute by playing. It seemed as though it made her question her value and worth as a player, member of the team, and person. However, when Kylie was injured, she took an active role on the team both because of her own perspective and the way her coach handled her injury. Kylie said, "My head coach told me, he's like you're going to be as big of part of this team injured as you would be healthy...he's like I almost want you to like become a coach with us." This remark seemed to elicit more positive energy approaching an injury and help surround the experience with more positive meaning. Lacey faced a back injury and felt as though her team was judging her during her recovery period. She said:

I also got injured so I was like, wasn't around the team for two months. I hurt my back and that was pretty rough. I think that a lot of people thought that I wasn't trying and I wasn't like trying to get better and it wasn't something I could help; it was bulged two disks. I was out like in the bed couldn't do anything and that came across to people as

me like not caring about my sport like not trying hard and that kinda stuff so its been rough.

Monica got a concussion her freshman year. When talking about this experience she said she, “...was out for three weeks so that was tough just not being able to be apart of my team and what was going on...I kinda missed out on that trying to get healthy and wasn’t really around so that was tough.” Shortly after her concussion she got injured again. Monica said, “I just kept trying to tell myself just to stay positive, that this is just like a little hiccup that I have to get over, ya know minor setback for a major comeback.”

Rachel came into the program with an injury midyear and had surgery in January. In her situation, it wasn’t necessarily the injury that was hard, but her perceived lack of social support. Rachel said, “I mean they (her team) were quite friendly the first time I got here, ya know let me know if you need anything but then when it really came down to it, when I did need stuff, they were like no ask this person ask somebody else.” It seemed as though injury cultivated insecurities about the participants’ contribution, worth, and belonging within the team. However, whenever coaches such as Kylie’s coach told her to become a coach and she knew that she was still wanted as a member of the team, this seemed to reassure her and help her to stay positive throughout her injury.

Additionally, many participant’s mentioned ways that they coped with injury and sought support during this time. Many of the athletes coped by leaning on the comfort they found in other’s experiences. Many times they felt isolated during injury, like no one else understood. In Emma’s situation, she turned to her sister and a teammate who had both torn their ACLs before. Emma said:

So being able to talk to them about like hey this is getting really frustrating and them being able to say like yeah I've been there and yeah that really sucks. Cause that was they were the first people that I was able to hear that from and I was able to understand that I'm not the only one that's ever gone through this.

When Rachel faced her injury and felt as though she had no support, she turned to her faith to cope with the hard time. When asked how she coped with the tough stuff she went through, Rachel responded, "My faith in God. I pray a lot. Read my bible (pause). And like at the time, there wasn't anybody."

People Leave

Another aspect of the grind was the change that took place in various ways. Not only did seniors leave each year and freshman join, some teammates would quit, transfer, get kicked off while coaches would leave and new coaches would come. To illustrate this, Anna said, "The team dynamics have been so different all the different years. It just like depends on who's there." Seven of the participants had a coaching change throughout their experience. Although, many of the participants felt as though the coaching change was positive. Shawn said, "When she quit we added four new coaches. And its safe to say that I, I'm really happy with the four coaches we added." Monica also had a coaching change during her sophomore year. When discussing her coaching change, Monica said, "And I'm kind of glad that I've had the opportunity to experience both eras ya know. Finish up the (coach name) era and then begin the (new coach's name) era." Kylie had a similar perspective as Monica. When discussing the differences in coaching styles between the head coach her freshman year and the new head coach, Kylie said, "I think, I'm kind of like blessed to have like both perspectives." Emma's position coach ended up leaving during her experience as well. She felt as though they were really close and she was not happy about

the way that she found out about him leaving the team. Emma said, “It was a little weird how we found out though. Our head coach tweeted about it. He didn’t tell us.” Additionally, Alex said, “I’m on my fifth assistant coach right now in four years.” Although many of the coaching changes were positive, the great amount of change had a definitive impact on the participant’s experiences.

There was also a great amount of turnover among teammates. Many of the participants started in a freshman class of many more than they spoke of now. Kylie stated, “Well my class, freshman year there was 11 of us that came in and I am graduating with three from the original class.” Similarly Emma said, “Yeah, when I came in there was six of us in my class. There were six freshmen. And a few of them left because of our coach. Quite a few people, I’ve had 16 people leave in my four years here.” Emma said that her coach would not allow her to be friends with people who left the team or were kicked off and that was really hard for her. Her perspective is also a little bit different because she is the last one left from her original class of six freshmen. Emma said:

...But I mean that’s just its been different coming in and having all of these girls so committed and so excited about (school) and (sport) and everything when we were in high school and senior year in high or even freshman year here and were so excited about like our future and what were going to do and everything and then just seeing that kinda dwindle out like one by one and then being the last one here.

Liz was also the last senior left in her class. She said, “About half of the class usually leaves each year, and so we had five and I was the only one. The only senior.” It seemed as though there was sadness with those who left, but also pride with being either the only one, or one of the only ones left and finishing the quest they began as freshmen.

Pressure

Many of the participants referenced pressure in relation to their experience. Pressure was primarily linked to the term performance and in the general sense of being a student-athlete with different stressors. Rachel said:

We (student-athletes) don't have just the average pressure of somebody growing up in life or and dealing with relational issues or exams we have also the pressure of like dealing with teammates dealing with having to perform at a higher level all the time, and sometimes not having things go your way, dealing with your coaches not be as pleased with you or feeling like they're picking on you so like its so easy with things coming at you in every direction to feel to just be like (name) inward and like become very depressed and that's why also like a lot of athletes deal with disorders like mentally...

Emma Clink talked about the pressure to lead and represent her team and the institution. Emma Clink said, "It's a lot of pressure but its good at the same time. I think that's helped me grow...I feel very much responsible for the team and their actions and how we get on as a team." This relates back to the definition of grind. It is friction that creates a sharper result than what was originally there.

Emma Clink continued:

I feel like a lot of responsibility and like I want to succeed for not only like myself but it's a lot bigger than me when you have the pressure you know like they expect a lot from you and I definitely want to fulfill their expectation... I think yeah I mean obviously when you come in your quite young and kind of naïve to the whole situation. I think like I came in with three other girls and we had a lot of expectations, we were like the number

one recruiting class in the country or whatever... you know like here at (University) like they do expect the highest level and you know winning is really the only option...

Lacey's team also combined programs during her time at (institution) and men and women began training together under one coach. Lacey said, "Its kinda a lot of pressure cause I'm the first like female athlete he's ever coached. So he's all the time saying, we gotta show 'em something this year." When Anna discussed the pressure she felt to perform, she felt as though this derived from both fear, particularly the fear of disappointment. Referring to her years as an underclassman, Anna said, "I felt like I did a lot of things like out of fear a little bit." Although the athletes felt pressure for different reasons, pressure was a prominent aspect of their experiences, which some felt as negative and others were able to find meaning in the pressure through perceived growth.

Many of the participants felt pressure to prove themselves in order to gain respect within their teams and from coaches. This feeling derived for various reasons among participants. Many athletes revealed that this feeling was especially prevalent as a walk-on. Anna said:

Coming in as a walk-on, you definitely spend a lot of time proving yourself and how you are going to help the team. During my freshmen year I tried to lay low and not get in the way of varsity and learn as much as I could from them, but they didn't give respect easily.

Lacey, also a walk-on, felt the pressure to prove herself within her team. Lacey said, "I really felt that pressure my freshman year, like I really gotta improve I really gotta ya know like prove that I'm you know um at the level that I need to to be at (institution)..." Rachel, although she did not mention if she is a walk on or not, felt pressure to prove herself through performance—particularly because she struggled with connecting with the team her first semester on campus

and was not training with them due to injury. Rachel said, "...then also just like I guess making my name get like trying to prove myself basically when it was time to compete." However, Rachel also acknowledged that this isn't the way she should have to earn the respect of her teammates. Rachel said:

...I thought like maybe if I start, if I was (sport) faster or placing higher then ya know people would be a lot more willing to even like acknowledge me...But that's not right. It's not right to measure myself in that way. That's not why people should want to speak to me in the first place or like even have any interest in getting to know me more, but its just unfortunate that just sometimes that's just kinda the way it is.

Right or not, these are feelings that participants felt—it seemed as though this feeling lingered throughout their experience but was especially prevalent during the freshman year, particularly for walk-ons, as they began to find a role on the team.

Coaching Issues

Many participants seemed to have healthy relationships with their coaches, however it was evident that some did not, and this relationship seemed to have a large bearing on the meaning they assigned to their experience. Those with a more negative coach-athlete relationship seemed to be more likely to question the purpose of their experience than those with a healthy relationship. Emma, although she never blatantly said, struggled with her head coach. She said:

I like to tell myself this is preparing me for the real world and preparing me for some like horrible boss that I'm gonna have...But, just being able to take the words he's saying and understand the things that he's telling me to do and not the tone that he's

telling me to do it in. Like when he's this close to my face and absolutely screaming at me.

Although Emma really liked her position coach, their relationship struggled at times as well. When she was injured, she put on weight and her coaches would address this weight frequently. She brought up the fact that her coaches would address her weight. The researcher probed, saying, "You also said that your coaches were reminding you that you had put on weight after you got injured. Can you expand upon that relationship and that dynamic?" Emma then took it from there. Emma said, he never blatantly said she put on weight, but he would encourage her to do extra cardio and extra work. He would incentivize this with playing time. Emma said:

He would say things like well it doesn't matter how much extra cardio you're doing if you're still drinking a case of beer every week. And I wasn't. I wasn't drinking at all. So that really hurt to be quite honest. And I don't know I just kind of felt like the way that they were talking to me and addressing the problem wasn't really something that was very encouraging and really made me want to fix it even.

Another barrier to the relationship between Emma and her coach had been his lack of acknowledgment to her contributions, especially as her career came to a close. Emma said:

I've been pretty frustrated with our coach lately too because he's been, he'll start me and then he'll take me out after I make one mistake, and he lets someone else make 7, 8, 9 errors in a row before he calls a timeout even, doesn't even take them out, just calls a timeout. And I'm getting frustrated with that because I can see that he's building for the future and he doesn't so much care about what I'm doing any more. So he's putting the younger players in. It's, it's sad because I've put a lot of my life into this.

Furthermore, Liz struggled with her coaches. One of the first things she said, when asked about her experience as a student-athlete at (institution) was, “Uh, I love the university, coaches are a little sketchy. Not a big fan of them...” This is how she began her story when asking about her whole experience—it began with someone else. This helps illustrate the impact that a coach or coaching staff can have on the experience of a student-athlete. Liz said she felt as though her coaches picked her on. She felt as though she could never do anything right to please them. Liz said, “I mean everyone has their own flaws, so if you constantly pick on that one flaw you’re not going to see all of the greatness that they have.” Although she felt as though her coaches picked on her, she also felt as though they began to listen to her more as an upperclassman. Liz said, “Communication now is a lot better just because I’m a senior and they listen to me.” This relates back to having to prove oneself early on and then earning the respect of the team and coaches. Emma Clink, although she has a healthy relationship with her coaches, she acknowledged the time it took to build that relationship. Emma Clink said, “At the beginning I saw them as kinda a boss whereas now as I’ve gotten older and more have more impact on the team as a as a leader, its more of a even kinda relationship.”

Student-Athlete Bubble

Many participants mentioned the community within the athletic department whether this was their team, coaching staff, support staff, or ways to get involved within the athletic department. This provided them with their own community and resources, however many participants failed to engage outside of the student-athlete bubble. It served them both positively and negatively depending on the perspective and particular experience. The subthemes of student-athlete bubble include *overwhelming support, consuming, and my team*.

Overwhelming Support

Support meant different things to different participants, however it was mentioned many times throughout each interview. Nine participants mentioned support in some capacity. It was mentioned an average of 3.8 times per interview. Alex struggled with an injury throughout her experience, which elicited both anxiety and depression. She felt as though she had undeniable support from a psychologist. Alex said:

Eventually having her (psychologist) to go talk to and tell her what was going on and knowing she was there for me ya know for whatever I needed to help me get through this, it just ya know I owe a lot to her for helping me get through that and I mean its just fantastic and to help me feel normal again and to just tell me that what I was going through (depression and anxiety) was ok and that we could find a way to fix it and ya know a lot of people go through that because we go to the training room and get out bodies fixed, but I feel like a lot of people wont talk about like what mentally could be going on...To have those people that have helped me and know that they're still on my side and still check in with them every once in a while. That's great. And ya know as a student-athlete knowing that those people are there for me all the time to not only care about how I'm playing but how I'm doing personally. Ya know that's just great.

Anna mentioned support regularly throughout her interview. Anna did not anticipate that she would be a collegiate athlete until she was recruited on campus her freshman year. She said, "...it was really like eye opening to see everything because they really provide you with, it was cool to see like how much, how much support there is. Whether its like the athletic training or the academic support ...” When Monica faced injury, she felt a great amount of support. Monica said, "...my family was extremely encouraging they would you know come to visit, check on

me, calling, texting you know my teammates and coaching staff they were the same way they always call, text me..." Kylie referred to her support as overwhelming. When discussing her injury, Kylie said, "And so after that it was just like I tore it on a Monday and had surgery on Friday. So it wasn't a ton of time, but I just go like overwhelming support from my team it's just like the family thing that I was talking about." Lacey felt medical support when she was injured as well. Lacey said, "But I mean everyone in the athletic department was like really supportive and they were on top of things in getting me better and stuff." The support most mentioned included medical, academic, and social support from the team.

Being a student-athlete within the athletic department provided many of the participants with different groups to associate with as well as a community of athletes who shared similar experiences. Many of the participants mentioned the opportunity to get to know student-athletes from different sports through organizations like the Student Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC), Athletes in Action, (AIA), the dining hall, and simply sporting events. Many participants recognized the support both within their team and within the athletic department across different teams. Anna said, "But its great having a friend group like your teammates to always spend time with. We do most things together because for the most part these are most of our closest friends." Emma said:

Coming in as a freshman you're put with only athletes and you kind of get this mindset that athletes are a different breed of student and that other students just don't understand what were going through. And that kind of athletes are like top on campus and that kind of thing. So, I was really close with my freshman class and we were really close with all the freshman of different sports too.

Rachel found a home within Athletes in Action, where she met athletes outside of her sport.

Rachel said:

So through that (athletes in action) I was able to meet and interact with athletes from like softball, football, rowing and whatever other sports there were that also be apart of it...its just a good way to be able to interact with people who went through similar experiences because as an athlete you just have the pressures of being able to perform, having to perform at a certain level, and maintain a healthy balance between like how much your working at your academics and how much rest your getting and how your training. So just being able to interact with people who had the same struggles as I did, but also had the same mind of like people who also um had just the common desire of like having like growing their relationship with, with Christ. It was its something that I cherish.

Emma Clink found the opportunity to be social through being a part of the athletic department and found enjoyment in supporting her friends on other teams. She said, "...I love the collegiate sport aspect of it not just myself but going and seeing other events and that's really like the social life for me here is that and kind of mingling with the other sports and everything." Although Emma Clink loved the aspect of being social through athletics and being able to support her friends at sporting events, she also acknowledged that sometimes athletes are in a bubble. Emma Clink said, "I think a lot of the time we are very much like in our own little world like we all go to practice and we all go to workouts and we all have lunch together and we all normally go have dinner together and the same parties and the same social lives..." The athletes seemed to appreciate the support that athletics provided, such as an immediate friend group in teammates, and friends from other sports, however it also seemed as though they struggled to cultivate social groups outside of sport. The athletic community was a bubble and they rarely ventured out.

Consuming

Many athletes considered their experience to be positive, but the athletic portion of their experience was very consuming. As Anna said there are certain nonnegotiables such as practice, competition, travel, and injury prevention and rehabilitation. Many participants also mentioned the mental consumption athletics can have. Even after leaving the practice, it is hard to truly leave the practice. Anna said, "...the pressure is also a lot of the reason your sport starts to take over your life, since there's always another test, workout, or race that you have to prepare for...I mean it kinda it kinda takes over your whole life."

Emma Clink said:

Ya know if we aren't doing well or aren't practicing well or have a bad weekend other things are suddenly impacted. Ya know like work seems like the last thing you want to do and you do badly on a test and socially probably you know, don't want to be around people and I think that's definitely that's what's made it, made it harder for me cause I feel like the (sport) just has an impact on all aspects of everything even if we try and not let it.

Emma said:

When you realize that your time is not your own anymore. And being able to understand that part where my free time, yeah I'm going to have like a couple hours off but that's going to end up being filled with meetings and rehab and unexpected extra weight room visits (laughs) and all of that kind of thing or the meeting with my professors because I missed class when we were traveling.

Additionally, Anna mentioned that her team is the majority of who she hangs out with—which she likes. However she said, "I guess one thing we when you spend time together we usually

talk about (sport).” Which can be consuming in that it is the same people and they constantly discussed their sport. When discussing Lacey’s outside interest of horses, she said, “I think its good to have something where you can get away from all of it. Because I think if I didn’t have that time, and I know if my teammates didn’t have that time...we would all be kinda crazy.”

Therefore, the athletic aspect of the experience was consuming both mentally and physically and taxed most of their energy.

My Team

Many of the participants, even if they struggled at the beginning, ended up finding a home within their team and forming lasting bonds with teammates, particularly those in their incoming class. Kylie said:

Like when you put like everything on the line like during a game with someone and see like all of their emotions and stuff it just like brings you closer together and then just like how much time is spent together with even like conditioning... And like stuff like that brings you really close that you wouldn’t experience with like normal friendships I guess.

Monica referred to her team as a sisterhood. She said, “...where in college you actually really get to know people on a personal level you know you live together, you spend so much time together and its really like a family and a sisterhood...”

Monica went on to say:

...At the end of the day, the 13 other people that’s on that line with you running, they’re the only ones that matter. So I think you go through hard things with each other and you learn to trust each other you know build that foundation that, I feel like you can’t help but ya know be friends, get along and you know have that chemistry.

Although many of the participants talked about the closeness and bond between teammates, many also referred to the times of disarray. When the participants referred to these moments, many times it was in reference to being a part of a team with women. Emma said:

So of the returners, I absolutely love every single one of them. And there's a few of the freshman that I really like too. So, I feel really close with everyone on my team this year except for like maybe three girls (laughs), which is pretty amazing when you put like 15 girls together. Like, you're not going to get that many girls that actually like each other.

Emma Clink mentioned team clashing as a result of being on team with all women as well. She said, "I think its definitely just more of an issue with female teams in general. Like I know its not just our team ya know so that helps definitely." Anna felt like she was pretty close with many of the girls on her team, but it was helpful to have one person that you can trust with all information. Anna said:

I think that's helped me a lot having one person, she's the person I vent to about practice. I don't know we talk about everything and so its just like its, nice especially on the team, where you really there like gossip is like a big thing especially a team of girls...

Shawn referenced the effect of being on an all women team as well. However, Shawn has a unique perspective. Shawn's team combined from an all women's team to a men and women's team during her experience. Shawn said:

I loved the competitive atmosphere that the girls brought to it. A lot of times I wasn't so thrilled with sometimes the drama and whatnot girls can have at practice or there can be on an all-girls team.

Every participant referred to their team as a team of "girls" rather than women and they attributed conflict to this aspect of their team.

Passing It On

Senior year was also mentioned as a distinctive role within the student-athlete experience. Most participants did not reference their sophomore or junior year unless they were trying to place a particular experience. However, senior year seemed to be an experience in itself—this was the time that they passed everything on to their team. The role that senior year played in their experiences started well before senior year. This started as freshman when they began learning from coaches, teammates, and particularly the upperclassmen that lead their respective teams. The subthemes of passing it on are *learning and teaching*.

Learning

One hundred percent of the participants mentioned learning within the description of her experience. A variation of the word “learn” was mentioned exactly 100 times with the greatest being 34 times by one participant and the least being one. On average, each participant mentioned the word learn 10 times throughout her interview. Learning is essentially the ground of the themes. Nearly all meaning in experience is filtered through this medium. Rachel referred to her experience as just that, a “learning experience.” Rachel said:

There are always things that you can learn from as you, as you face different experiences in life so while I mean for the most part I’ve been sharing stuff that had that seems very like depressing for lack of a better word, but in the midst of it all, there have been like areas that I’ve seen like myself grow from it or seen where its just like turned around to be something that had, that was turned around for something good.

Emma Clink said, “...but a lot of the things I’ve learned from being a student-athlete and ya know that change has definitely grown my self as a person and all the traits I’ve learned from

that are things that kind of will be there for, for life. So, I'm, I'm grateful for that." Emma Clink continued to say:

Like my time here obviously it has been a roller coaster ride and there's always ups and downs, but I wouldn't change I wouldn't change the experience that I've had and the things that I've learned and both on the (sport) court and off.

Kylie, found that her injury taught her the perspective of different teammates. She thought what she learned being injured would help her in her final season. Kylie said:

I think I've really learned a lot this year just from like watching and being in other people's shoes on the sidelines. Cause there's girls on the team that are juniors that have played a total of like 90 minutes in their career. And so it's interesting to see like that perspective of like not stepping on the field for a whole season. So I think it will help me be like a better player and like a leader for next year just from seeing different perspectives and just like watching the game for a whole year.

Although Liz struggled throughout her four years with negative experience such as not clicking with her teammates or coaches, she felt as though she was able to draw on these experiences and learn from them. Liz said, "...so I definitely learned how to live on my own, how to deal with my bills, how to get my self out of different situations (laughs), and again communication is a huge thing." When discussing the motivation to be a good student, Lacey said, "And I think it also comes from like the disciple that you kinda learn as being an athlete." Alex mentioned a variation of the word "learn" (for example learned) 34 times throughout her interview. She said, "I think I've learned a lot and ya know I couldn't be luckier to be on the team with these girls that I'm with and to learn from my coaches and ya know being in an awesome place like (institution)." Monica said, "...these four years I learned a lot about myself I feel like I've

grown as an individual had good times and bad times, but I think like overall looking back on it its been a great four years.” Learning varied from skills within sport, to learning from coaches, teammates, and just about oneself. However, no matter the type of learning, each participant mentioned the act of learning and many found meaning in their experience through this. The tough times had purpose, because on the other side of those experiences—they learned from it.

Many of the participants specifically referenced the senior class or a particular senior on the team when they were freshman. Through this particular senior, they were able to form a connection and absorb the wisdom of that senior and learn from them. Seniors on the team impacted the participants’ experiences. Emma Clink had one of the most distinct relationships with a senior her freshman year. Emma Clink said, “Like when I was a freshman, my senior had a huge, huge impact on me. And she definitely taught me a lot about the university, the sport, the commitment, all those kind of values...” Emma went on to say:

... she was like an all-American all four years pretty much. And just I saw how highly respected she was both on the court and off the court and kind of looked up to her tremendously. She was a huge kind of inspiration...

Monica also mentioned the influence that her seniors had on her during her freshman season. She talked about the encouragement she received from the seniors when she faced tough times while she was a freshman. Lacey has also emulated a senior she had in her career by leading her underclassmen similarly to the way her senior lead her. Lacey said, “And her senior year it was just a huge switch. Ya know if I wasn’t very focused in practice like she let me know. Now the girl under me if she’s not focusing at practice like I can remember you know my teammate...” Additionally, Kylie formed a bond with a senior on her team when she was a freshman. Kylie said, “I think one of my best friends when I was a freshman was a senior so its like how our team

is like really close. There wasn't really a separation even though I was like 18 and she was 22." The only classes mentioned throughout each participant's experiences were the senior class, or a senior, and the class in which the participants entered the institution. This spoke to the impact those seniors can have on the underclassman on the team, both positively and negatively, depending on how they are lead and if they attempted to make a connection with the underclassmen.

Teaching

In addition to learning, the participants mentioned teaching and helping as meaningful aspects of their experiences. Teaching particularly occurred as an upperclassman and leader within the team. Learning and teaching generally went hand in hand and teaching also contributed to the meaning of the participant's experiences.

Alex said:

I learned so much about myself. I learned so much about how to become a successful student-athlete here. I think not only has it benefitted me, but I feel like maybe I've been able to pass that information down to some of my teammates.... Maybe if that helps this team in future years. Then ya know maybe it was all worth it.

Monica said:

...I think I've just gotten to the point where now I'm stable ya know in myself and my abilities and what I can do on and off the (sport) court so being able to help and give back to my teammates you know means a lot to me.

Rachel said:

...as a leader just being able to encourage my younger teammates when they go through different experiences like not performing as well as they would like to at a meet or not

doing too well in practice, feeling as though they're being picked on or left out that type of thing and so that's when I can look at my experiences that I saw as negative when I was my first few years when I was struggling like being able to use those to help somebody else who's also like maybe going through something similar not maybe the exact thing but like a similar situation.

Lacey said the transition has been rather natural instead of purposeful. Lacey said, "And it has kinda seemed like a natural transition. It wasn't like ok I'm a senior now I better work hard and show people how it's done and teach them you know what people taught me." Emma said, "But I'm trying to teach them (freshman) a lot too about being accountable for themselves and being accountable for their school and like their decisions off the court really impact what goes on for everybody on the court and it really impacts our entire team." Although many of the participants have taught, helped, and supported the underclassman in different ways, the teaching was a critical part of their role on the team and the meaning in their experience. As Alex referenced, if she can help them, maybe her experience, injury, and hurt was worth it. After learning from her serious back injury, Alex said:

You know, I know it made a difference in my life but ya know maybe if it could help some of the other people and maybe if it helped my coach learn. Maybe if it helped my strength coach learn. My coach will be here for who knows how much longer. Maybe if that helps this team in future years. Then ya know maybe it was all worth it.

A part of teaching included leading. Many of the seniors accepted a leadership role on the team. And many felt as though this role came with responsibility and many challenges—leading was harder than they had initially thought. Additionally, as a leader on the team, many

participants referenced the role of serving as a liaison between the coaches and the athletes.

Rachel said:

...being a senior I know I know people are looking up to me so I do make sure I am like setting a good example because that's important as a senior because what the seniors do is generally or what the leaders do on the team is what the others will follow.

On Kylie's team, there is a group called the leadership group. Kylie, was in the leadership group her junior year and her fourth year as she redshirted due to injury. During her redshirt year she was also considered a captain. When discussing her leadership role when injured Kylie said:

Cause like the freshman on the team have never even seen me play (sport). So then its like, I'm in this captains role where usually your captains are on the field playing. So I've kinda had to like be careful with like how I lead especially the freshman.

Emma has also found herself in a leadership role as the only senior in her class. Emma said, "And after my entire class left I was kind of forced to step up and do that which is fine but that's not really my personality. So that's been a big transition for me as well." Emma continued to say, "So being able to have people look up to me at first was really intimidating and really kinda terrifying, but I think I've adjusted pretty well to it and I can like understand what they want and what our coaches want and all that kind of thing." Liz struggled to lead because she perceived her leading philosophy to be different than her coaches. She said, "...they (coaches) said that I wasn't leading enough. Which in my way I was leading perfectly fine. But they wanted me to yell at teammates and that's not who I am. I lead by example. I help coach." Lacey has also found herself in a leadership role on her team. Lacey said:

Like when you're an underclassman its like your job to just like perform at your best, and like kinda fly under the radar. Or that's how it seemed. Like that's like the vibes that I

got as an underclassman. Just, just do your thing you know cheer on your teammates like that's your job. And now it's kinda like ok, like now I feel like I need to step up and be like well ok guys maybe you don't need to be screaming down the hallway of the hotel. Like, I feel like it's my job to step up and be the leader, I guess.

Many of the participants discussed their leadership role as an upperclassman and their focus on leading and teaching the rest of their teammates through this role.

Another aspect of teaching was leaving a legacy. Many of the athletes have discussed the legacy of being a student-athlete. Although, much of their legacy, as they acknowledged, is left in those they teach, some participants addressed legacy directly. Emma Clink said, "trying to do more for ya know like kinda leave a (pause) legacy I guess which is something I wouldn't have thought when I came in but now its kind of coming towards an end I see why that thought process should be there." Emma also acknowledged her legacy. She said, "So I guess ya, so just trying to go forward and finish out and kinda give people a reason to remember me because I don't want to be just a forgotten player that was here." Additionally, Alex recognized that when she is done, she hopes to leave something behind. Alex said,

...Because ya know when I'm done playing college (sport) when I'm done at (institution), the only thing left behind of me is going to be what did I teach the girls?

Did I help the coaches learn at all? Ya know and that's it. You're done besides that.

It was evident as illustrated through the mention of legacy that the participants wanted their experience to mean something not just to them but also to those around them. They wanted to be remembered and an important part of the team now and after they finish because of those that they influenced and taught.

Chapter V: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experience of the collegiate female student-athlete. These experiences were different for each participant—and are not generalizable to the female student-athlete population, however the themes can help cultivate depth of understanding and awareness among those working in collegiate athletics for practical application.

Connections to Previous Literature

Each theme demonstrates connections to previous literature and can be used to strengthen the literature on the experiences of collegiate female student-athletes. The findings can then be applied to coaches, administrators, and support staff to enhance and strengthen the experiences of this unique population. The experiences of the participants provide rationale for implementing and strengthening the experiences of female student-athletes within collegiate athletic departments.

Transition Blues

Transition blues was a prominent theme within the study. Many of the participants had feelings of wanting to go home, quit, and transfer upon arrival at the institution. It is important to note that these feelings were widespread and a natural part of their transition not only into collegiate athletics, but adulthood. Pummell, Hardwood, and Lavalley (2007) conducted a study regarding career transitions for adolescent athletes. This study deals with a different age group, yet is still informative to improve the transition of freshman female student-athlete's into higher education. Pummell et al. (2007) said:

...An athlete making the athletic transition from mastery to perfection may be concurrently making the psychological transition from adolescence to adulthood as well as the transition from secondary to higher education...In addition to this, at the social

level, the primary interpersonal support network for an athlete at this stage may shift from peers, parents, and coach to a partner and a coach. (p. 429)

This further pleads the need for athletic departments to be proactive in supporting student-athletes as they acclimate to their new environment and expectations. In the current study, international and out-of-state domestic student-athletes generally reported greater feelings of homesickness and the desire to quit or leave; this population should be particularly nurtured upon arrival. Additionally, female student-athletes entering collegiate athletics and the parents of these athletes should prepare for these feelings before entering the institution.

Falls and Wilson (2012) conducted a study with Canadian women who traveled to the United States to play NCAA soccer and had since exhausted their NCAA eligibility. The study focused on the impact of transition. Falls and Wilson (2012) found that the team helped alleviate some of the stress of the initial transition into college. Falls and Wilson (2012) said:

...While the women in this study experienced the physical, mental, and emotion intensity of university soccer in some what distinct ways, the bond that many of them created with their teammates and the shared athletic identity they developed was critical in their attempts to deal with the larger and smaller challenges they all faced during transition. (p. 584)

Falls and Wilson (2012) said many of the participants felt that it was helpful having a group of women to form instant connections with on campus and help them acclimate to life as a student-athlete. In the current study, Emma mentioned a similar experience. Her team arrived on campus before classes were in session, and she felt as though this was a good time to meet other athletes and form friendships with teammates. This time allowed the student-athletes to make one transition at a time, rather than simultaneously. In order to replicate this feeling of acclimation

mentioned in Falls and Wilson (2012) and in the current study, athletic departments can provide incoming student-athletes with a week of orientation programming activities prior to the start of classes. These activities could include icebreakers, team building, and informative workshops to ensure their well being during this difficult transition. This can be done as an athletic department and as a team. Additionally, coaches, support staff, and administrators must display patience and be available and open to discussing the student-athletes' transition blues. Upperclassmen student-athletes can reach out to the freshman and "show them the ropes," make meaningful and genuine connections, share their experiences, and once again be available.

Participants in the current study also felt the effects of being a senior and the emotions attached to the thought of not being apart of a team or participating in sport. Falls and Wilson (2012) found that the athletes that transitioned completely out of sport (did not pursue sport professionally) were disillusioned and had a difficult time. Although it is common and healthy for athletes to have a strong athletic identity, "sporting identity is likely to dominate and subsume all other identities" (Falls and Wilson, 2012, p. 587). Beamon (2012) conducted a study with 20 African American men following their transition out of Division IA athletics. One hundred percent of the participants reported struggling as they transitioned out of sport. Beamon (2012) said, "Most described feeling depressed and reported feeling a loss liken to personal death, the loss of a body part, or the loss of a family member" (p. 204). McArdle, Moore, and Lyons (2014) conducted a study that explored the transitions of elite athletes out of the Olympic games through a transition program. This study found that athletes who participated in the post-games transition program (offered at different tiers depending on the need) found it positive and useful. Tier two included group workshops, where Olympic athletes got together after the games and talked about their emotions post Olympic games. The

participants said that this helped normalize their feelings. One of the main barriers to participation was the stigma associated with seeing a psychologist and being perceived as “weak.” One way to combat this was to change the language used and attached to the activity. The first tier, a “mental cool down” with a sport psychologist, occurred within a couple days after the competition to make sense of the experience. This used athletic language that was not already stigmatized and could allow for more positive interpretation. The studies conducted by McArdle et al. (2014) and Beamon (2012), although slight differences in the population, directly relate to the current study. The sadness that the participants in the current study discussed may lead to the struggle that the participants in Beamon (2012) experienced.

With the combination of these studies, and the findings with the current study, athletic departments need to be aware and proactive in facilitating the transition out of collegiate athletics. There are many ways to implement this; one recommendation is to begin exploring different identities with the student-athlete during her freshman year and throughout her collegiate experience. It is not enough to provide an orientation to student-athletes freshman year upon arrival and senior year upon departure. Psychologists and counselors should continually be available throughout seasons to encourage and facilitate “mental cool downs” after events, identity exploration, and clinical counseling if necessary to prepare for this transition. Coaches, administrators, and support staff should work alongside student-athletes as they explore their identity; they should also encourage student-athletes to engage in the available resources within the university and athletic department.

Many times after a student-athlete finishes her season her senior year, there is a lull between finishing the season and graduation. Athletic departments may need to implement resources for athletes to use to specifically aid in this transition if there are none currently in

place. One recommendation would be to do group workshops with athletes that have just concluded their career and are still enrolled in school. This could help create unity among those transitioning out of sport and provide a unique support network similar to the team environment. During this time, coaches, administrators, and support staff should reach out to the athletes to discuss any transition blues rather than cut them off from the athletic department and move on to the next year's team.

Grinding It Out

When facing challenges such as injury, pressure, change, and coaching issues some participants struggled more than others. Alex became anxious and depressed when she faced injury and isolation from her team. Emma, Alex, Shawn, Monica and Rachel mentioned experiencing depression or depressive symptoms at some time throughout their experience. However, only one of these participants sought mental health services to combat this challenge. Emma was encouraged to meet with a psychologist by her athletic trainer and declined. Emma said, "I really should have looked into it and I just didn't because I was just (laughs) um whatever." This statement reinforces the idea that athletes are not comfortable discussing their weaknesses. It was hard for her to make sense of why she didn't reach out. At this point in the interview, the researcher knew there was more to tap into about this issue, but also wanted to respect her vulnerability and let her discuss what she felt comfortable discussing. Emma's response to the encouragement to seek out mental health services aligns with the research conducted by Etzel et al. (2006), which states that athletes tend to under-use mental health services. The participants in this study seemed to keep their struggle private. Jenny Moshak, sports medicine professional said, "They're (student-athletes) supposed to be poster children, but these young women are facing so many issues that people don't realize" (Gariner, 2006, para. 5).

It seemed as though the participants didn't feel many people would understand what they were going through, nor did they want to admit that they were struggling. When probed about these experiences, naturally it was hard to discuss, however, it seemed as though it was hard because it had been avoided. Tamminen et al. (2013) connected the feeling of isolation and withdrawing to the perceptions of being an elite athlete. Tamminen et al. (2013) said these athletes may feel as though they should be able to handle any issues on their own, rather than seeking help in others. Alex said, "...a lot of people go through that because we go to the training room and get out bodies fixed, but I feel like a lot of people won't talk about like what mentally could be going on." Alex, the participant who sought help when facing this was able to articulate her struggles more freely than the others. It seemed as though Alex had assigned meaning to her experience that she was more confident in than the rest. Similarly to the study conducted by Tamminen et al. (2013) the participants were able to grow from these experiences when they found purpose and meaning behind them. Alex perceived to grow through her experiences as a student-athlete. She said:

Yeah, I think that being a student-athlete has helped me to love myself even more.

Because I see what I've gone through and what I've had to do and ya know just makes me ya know try to be even kinder to myself and um just keep ya know not getting so harsh on myself.

As recognized by Beauchmein (2014) and Etzel et al. (2006), student-athletes experience high levels of stress and greater numbers of stressors, and if these stressors are not handled appropriately these can lead to bad health habits (Hudd et al., 2000). Luckily, Alex sought out mental health professionals, Rachel turned to her faith, and Shawn had an honest and open relationship with her coaches. In turn, these issues were diffused. Health habits within student-

athletes include more than physical habits such as exercise and nutrition. The NCAA Division I manual includes a principle of student-athlete well being. This says, “Intercollegiate athletics programs shall be conducted in a manner designed to protect and enhance the physical and educational well being of student-athletes” (NCAA, 2015, p. 3). Other aspects of wellness need to be recognized. Wellness includes, “an integrated method of functioning, which is oriented toward maximizing the potential of which the individual is capable. It requires that the individual maintain a continuum of balance and purposeful direction within the environment where she is functioning” (Dunn, 1977). Therefore, in order to maximize the potential of each student-athlete, each aspect of wellness must be developed and nurtured to serve her experience as a student-athlete as well as provide a foundation of wellness following this experience.

One of the primary challenges for two participants was coaching issues. Emma and Liz had negative experiences with their coaches that seemed to taint their experience. It was evident that Emma felt brushed off to the side when she was injured and transitioning out as a senior. Liz did not feel important to her coaches because she was not one of the “stars” of the team. As coaches, administrators, and support staff, it is vital to nurture the relationships with student-athletes so they feel like a valued part of the athletic department. This can lead to team cohesion, which can then lead to an increase in performance. This can also lead to a more satisfying experience for the student-athlete. As Kylie said, “He’s (head coach) like really family oriented and we know that he actually cares about us.” Coaches need to strive to instill this belief in their athletes through their actions.

Coaches, administrators, and support staffs need to create a culture within athletic departments that acknowledges the demands of being a student-athlete and in turn their needs. Even if athletic departments do not have the funds to hire additional more specialized staff,

acknowledging that the student-athletes have needs outside of athletics and academics provides a more holistic view of thriving and excellence.

Student-Athlete Bubble

As noticed by the participants, the athletic department provided many positive resources such as academic support, medical support, and social support. These were notable throughout many of the participant's experiences. Although the participants acknowledged the overwhelming support, the participants also acknowledged that they lived in an athletic bubble where they rarely interacted with programs or peers outside of the athletic department. Kylie said, "...It kind of almost consumes your life like in a good way, but I think (institution) has like exceeded my expectations for like what a college athletic experience would be like." The bubble wasn't considered negative, but it was acknowledged as being a factor in the experience of the student-athlete. DeFreese and Smith (2014) conducted a study examining the impact of social support and negative social interaction on the experiences and well being of collegiate athletes. The study confirmed the impact social support could have on either the ill being or well being of a student-athlete. DeFreese and Smith (2014) said, "...Social support exhibited a positive temporal association and negative social interactions exhibited a negative temporal association with athlete well being across the competitive season" (p. 627). As exhibited within the study conducted by DeFreese and Smith (2014), social support is a huge factor in the well being of the student-athlete. As mentioned by the authors, it is nearly impossible to extract all negative experiences from sport, however when negative experiences are present, it is important to offer support, resources, and teach student-athletes skills and strategies to cope with these experiences. Coaches, administrators, and support staff need to monitor the role they play in social support of the female collegiate student-athlete, particularly since this population is more

prone to mental health issues such as depression. Coaches should be particularly aware of the influence they have on the experiences of student-athletes. The bubble intensifies the impact the athletic department has on the experiences of the female student-athletes since student-athletes rarely interact with those outside of the athletic department. As demonstrated in the study conducted by DeFreese and Smith (2014), these social interactions can affect the experiences and well being of student-athletes during their time as a student-athlete and after.

Support between teams was highly regarded among participants. Going to the sporting events and supporting other teams was perceived as an enjoyable pastime. Other athletic department social groups such as SAAC and Athletes in Action were successful ways to meet athletes from other teams. These should continue to be valued and implemented within athletic departments to enhance the support among student-athletes between teams.

The participants felt as though the relationships within their respective teams and the athletic department was unique to collegiate athletics. The strength of the relationships with teammates was deeper than the strength of their relationship with others. Monica said, “They’re (the class she entered with) some of my best friends and I’m probably going to keep in contact with them forever.” Many of the participants mentioned being closest with their incoming class. Kylie particularly had a really close group of teammates and she referred to her team as a family. She said, “Freshman year there were 11 of us that came in and I am graduating with three from the original class...they’re like my best friends.” Anna said, “We (teammates) also spend a lot of time together because they’re pretty much my only, umm, for the most part, they’re the majority of my friend group.” It was evident that the participants had deep connections with their teammates and incoming class that they thoroughly enjoyed. Team leaders and captains can help foster these relationships by engaging with teammates outside of

the athletic environment. Although it is healthy to have friends outside of athletics, it seemed as though the participants loved their relationships with their teammates and future student-athletes should relish this opportunity. Current student-athletes, coaches, administrators, and support staff should nurture these relationships.

Many participants discussed the consuming nature of the athletic environment. They felt as though the athletic portion of their experience consumed their mind more than the rest. It appeared as though they struggled to develop and grow in ways that athletics did not nurture or demand, because they did not have the time, energy, or urgency. Anna referred to these as nonnegotiables such as practice, competition, injury prevention, class, etc. Everything else in life seemed negotiable, yet athletic obligations seemed nonnegotiable. Anna said, “I feel like I give practice and school kind of like 100 percent and then everything else I’m kind of like just getting by almost.” Emma Clink talked about the transferable nature of her emotions in relation to sport. If something positive happened in sport, it positively affected her life elsewhere. Yet, if something negative occurred in practice or competition, it negatively spread into other aspects of her life. It seemed as though the investment in athletics permeated deeper than other commitments. Falls and Wilson (2012) noted, it is normal for athletes to have a strong athletic identity, but athletes run into problems when that is the only identity. Coaches may need to employ the skills of a sport psychologist to teach athletes skills that help them control their thoughts and emotions. This could allow student-athletes to fully engage during practice and competition, yet disconnect and recharge away from their sport.

Coaches, administrators, and support staff can use this as a guide to help athletes develop skills that will not disappear when eligibility does. In relation to the wellness, the consuming nature of their athletic environment may fail to nurture all aspects of wellness. Likewise,

athletes may feel developed in each aspect (social, emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual) in relation to their athletic career. Coaches, administrators, and support staff should view the whole picture of their career. While student-athletes want to be the best they can be, and coaches are there to help them with that, coaches, administrators, and support staff should also prepare athletes for life after collegiate athletics.

Passing It On

Passing it on seemed to be the most deeply rooted theme. This theme was initiated with the learning process while facing transition blues and finding solace in the strength of senior leadership. Many of the participants were able to take what they had learned, and continued to learn throughout their upperclassman years, and use this to teach and lead their teammates. The participants particularly realized toward the end of the experience that what they teach and leave behind would determine their legacy. Rachel struggled transitioning into the social environment as a mid-year addition to the team. After experiencing this, she reached out to other teammates that she felt like were struggling as a freshman and tried to help them. Through this act, she has found meaning in her previous struggle because it gave her the perspective to be more aware of the needs of others as they experienced feelings similar to hers. As reflected through the participant's experiences in the current study, meaning was not necessarily found in the grind of the day-to-day experience, but in the learning, growth, and legacy that resulted from that experience.

Coaches, administrators, and support staff need to recognize how much student-athletes invest into their team, sport, and university. Toward the end of Emma's career, she felt as though the coach was already focused on team's potential next year. This seemed to deeply hurt her because of the investment and sacrifice she had made to be a collegiate athlete. Particularly

toward the end of careers, seniors need to feel valued by coaches, administrators, support staff, and teammates. The participants took pride in finishing their career. They took pride in leading their teammates. They took pride in representing their university. However, it wasn't until the end of their career that they felt as though they truly understood and valued these opportunities. Take time to recognize this population and reflect on their journey to help cultivate meaning in their experiences now and moving forward.

Perspective

This research acknowledges that it focused on the lived experience through certain perspectives. This research comes from the perspective of the current collegiate female student-athlete. A study with collegiate male student-athletes could elicit similar results, however that was not included within this study. The study also pertains to a primarily athletic perspective. Although all of the participants were enrolled academically in the institution, the participants generally discussed more of their athletic experience. Academics were mentioned, however it was not focused on within the interviews. This could have been because they knew the criteria for their participation in the study and it focused on collegiate female student-athletes or it could be attributed to the consuming nature of their athletic experience. Either way, this is important to acknowledge within this study.

Limitations

There are certain limitations within this study that need to be acknowledged. First, these student-athletes were all from the same institution and same division. There may be varying experiences between divisions and different institutions within divisions. Therefore, these experiences cannot be generalized to every collegiate female student-athlete. Additionally, as Burton et al. (2006) said, "each athlete has a unique story to tell, and a unique set of

circumstances to convey when reflecting back on individual journeys” (p. 124). Each participant entered her institution with different experiences that affected her perceptions of experiences within college. As Emma referenced in her interview, her club coaches were particularly obsessive with food and weight before she came to college causing her to enter with a poor mindset already. These are factors to acknowledge within the study.

It is also important to recognize that although a bracketing interview was used to bracket out the researcher’s biases, biases can never totally and completely be bracketed out. The researcher strived to stay as close to the text and data throughout analysis. However, each researcher may have a slightly different interpretation of the same text.

Recommendations for Future Research

Although the study elicited rich data regarding the lived experiences of the collegiate female student-athlete, future research can be conducted to cultivate an even greater depth of understanding regarding this population. Participants had to meet specific criteria to participate in the study including being in their third or fourth year of eligibility, currently enrolled in the institution of initial enrollment, and a participant on a varsity sport at an FBS Division I institution. Therefore, future research can focus on the lived experience of the female student-athlete at different divisions as well as institutions within the FBS division I level. Additionally, the lived experiences of collegiate male student-athletes from a holistic perspective can build on the existing literature and help decipher if these experiences are unique to women or unique to athletic departments.

Transition blues seemed to be experiences within the larger experience of a student-athlete collegiate career that warrants further research. These are two themes that can be specifically explored regarding the lived experience of these particular experiences. By

exploring the lived experiences of the female student-athletes in her freshman year, this experience can be more properly and vividly examined to create understanding while student-athletes are actively going through this experience. The participants talked about and described their experiences freshman year, however they have a different perspective now looking back than while they were actively engaging in those emotions and experiences. Additionally, these student-athletes were still actively participating in their sports at the time of the interview, yet, many discussed the idea of transitioning out of sport and the emotion tied to this experience. This is an experience that was not fully explored, because they had not yet transitioned out of sport. The experience of senior year during a student-athlete experience and moving on after sport can be explored more richly in future research.

Passing It On is another theme that can be explored more richly. The participants seemed very invested in this aspect of their experience. Future research can explore more specifically what they are learning from their careers as student-athletes, how they plan to pass it on, and what the best way to pass on this information may be.

The methodology employed for the purpose of this study allowed participants to fully embrace their experiences and share based on their perceptions rather than the researcher's agenda. Moving forward, phenomenology should be employed to cultivate depth of understanding with student-athletes and give voice to their experiences.

Summary of the Findings

The findings within this study add to the existing literature on the lived experience of the collegiate female student-athlete. Coaches, administrators, support staff, parents, and current and future female student-athletes can implement this knowledge almost immediately. Many of the participants felt as though their experiences were positive physically, intellectually, and socially.

However, when it came to the emotional and spiritual aspects of their experiences, these were not as nurtured. These aspects of the person need to be acknowledged and fostered within the collegiate female student-athlete population. Throughout the interview process, the researcher felt as though each interview came with ease. Naturally, some participants opened up more than others, however it seemed as though the participants wanted their voices heard. They had a story to tell and it was important. This further begs the need to acknowledge the emotional and spiritual aspects of the holistic care of the collegiate female student-athlete. It seemed as though they were asking for this. This can be implemented in a variety of ways. Coaches, administrators, and support staff need to be aware of this need. Additionally, female student-athletes need outlets to express and learn about their emotional needs such as through counseling and/or group workshops.

Additionally, meaning was many times formed through the process of learning and passing it on. No matter the experiences, positive or negative, if the student-athletes felt as though they were able to learn from these experiences, help someone else learn from their experiences, or pass down their newfound knowledge to their teammates, their experience seemed worthwhile. Fostering this process can help female student-athletes cultivate meaning in their experiences. Providing a mentor program within the athletic department that encourages the relationships between upperclassmen and underclassmen can begin this process. The mentor program can be supplemented through individual meetings with a counselor to provide opportunity for continual reflection, strategy implementation, and meaning making throughout her career.

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Appendix

APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL



1534 White Ave.
Knoxville, TN 37996-1529
865-974-7697
fax 865-974-7400

February 05, 2015

Kelsie Ann Patricia Saxe,
UTK - Kinesiology Recreation & Sport Studies

Re: UTK IRB-14-01874 XP
Study Title: The Lived Experience of the Female Student-Athlete

Dear Ms. Saxe:

The Administrative Section of the UTK Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed your **application** for the above referenced project. It determined that your application is eligible for **expedited** review under 45 CFR 46.110(b)(1), category/ies (6) and (7). The IRB has reviewed these materials and determined that they do comply with proper consideration for the rights and welfare of human subjects and the regulatory requirements for the protection of human subjects. Therefore, this letter constitutes full approval by the IRB of your application (version) as submitted. Approval of this study will be valid from December 2, 2014, to December 1, 2015. Your stamped, approved consent form is available in the study file in iMedRIS.

In the event that subjects are to be recruited using solicitation materials, such as brochures, posters, web-based advertisements, etc., these materials must receive prior approval of the IRB. Any revisions in the approved application must also be submitted to and approved by the IRB prior to implementation. In addition, you are responsible for reporting any unanticipated serious adverse events or other problems involving risks to subjects or others in the manner required by the local IRB policy.

Finally, **re-approval** of your project is required by the IRB in accord with the conditions specified above. You may not continue the research study beyond the time or other limits specified unless you obtain prior written approval of the IRB.

Sincerely,

Colleen P. Gilrane, Ph.D.
Chair

APPENDIX B: TABLES

Table 1.1 Participant Demographics

Pseudonym:	Eligibility year:	Age:	Family members:	Race/Ethnicity:
Emma Clink	4th	20	Mother, father, younger brother	Caucasian
Emma	4th	21	Mom, dad, older Sister	Caucasian
Kylie	Redshirt Junior	22	Mom, dad, older brother	Caucasian
Shawn	4th	22	Mom, dad, two brothers	Caucasian
Rachel	4th	22	Mom, dad, three sisters	Black
Monica	4th	21	Mom, dad, brother	African American
Liz	4th	21	Mom, dad, brother, other	Hispanic
Alex	4th	21	Mom, dad, younger sister	Caucasian
Lacey	4th; 3rd	22	Mom, dad, sister, brother	Caucasian
Anna	4th	22	Mom, dad, two brothers	Caucasian

Table 1.2 Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Subthemes	Theme Definition
Transition Blues	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Freshman Year Blues 2. Senior Year Blues 	Transition blues refers to the distinctive and emotional toll transition had as these female student-athletes began and concluded their experience.
Grinding It Out	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Injury 2. People Leave 3. Pressure 4. Coaching Issues 	Grinding it out refers to the act of working through the adversity the participants faced as a collegiate female student-athlete.
Student-Athlete Bubble	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consuming 2. Overwhelming Support 3. My Team 	The student-athlete bubble is the student-athlete world within the educational institution that the student-athletes are placed in when they arrive on campus.
Passing It On	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learning 2. Teaching 	Passing it on refers to the information that the participant's learned as a student-athlete and then felt compelled to pass down to teammates.

APPENDIX C: FIGURES

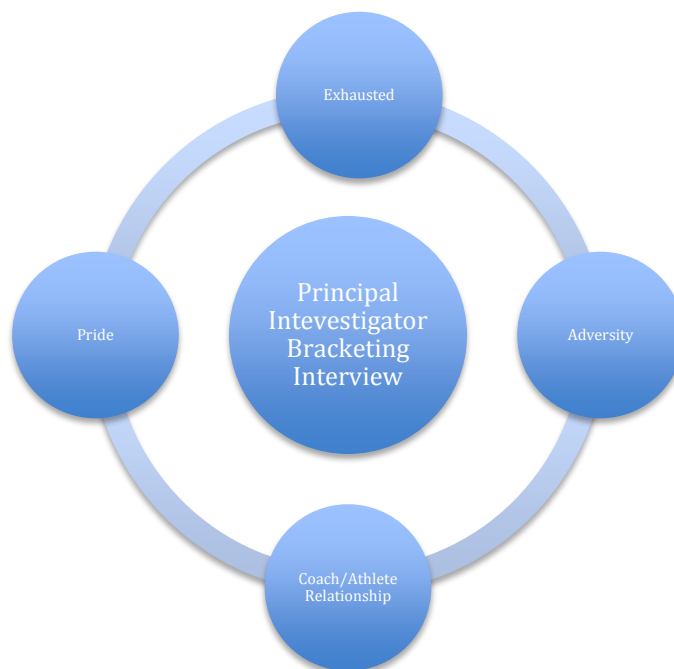


Figure 1.1 **Principal investigator's bracketing interview**

APPENDIX D: RECRUITING MATERIALS

1.1 Email to Director of Operations

Hello (name),

My name is Kelsie Saxe and I am a graduate student in Recreation and Sport Management. For my thesis, I am conducting regarding the lived experience of the female student-athlete. I will collect data through in-depth interviews with female student-athletes in their third or fourth year of eligibility that have not transferred from another institution. I have already submitted my research request to the IRB and am awaiting approval. However, in the meantime, I am hoping to set up interviews with student-athletes for the month of November so I am ready once I have approval.

(Student-athlete name), (Student-athlete name), (Student-athlete name), and (Student-athlete name) seem to fit all criteria. If you are willing, could you please pass this on to them and if any are interested in participating in the study they can contact me directly at ksaxe@vols.utk.edu or (865) 235-7311. That would be great. Thank you in advance for your help!

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Best,

Kelsie Saxe

University of Tennessee, Knoxville
 M.S. Recreation and Sport Management (May 2015)
 Graduate Teaching Associate
 ksaxe@vols.utk.edu
 (865) 235-7311

1.2 Email to Coach

Hello Coach (name),

My name is Kelsie Saxe and I am a graduate student in Recreation and Sport Management. For my thesis, I am conducting research regarding the lived experience of the female student-athlete. I will collect data through in-depth interviews with female student-athletes in their third or fourth year of eligibility that have not transferred from another institution. I have already submitted my research request to the IRB and am awaiting approval. However, in the meantime, I am hoping to set up interviews with student-athletes for the month of November so I am ready once I have approval.

(Student-athlete name) seems to fit all criteria and I am interested in interviewing her. If you are willing could you please pass on this information to (student-athlete name)?

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Thank you,

Kelsie Saxe

University of Tennessee, Knoxville
M.S. Recreation and Sport Management (May 2015)
Graduate Teaching Associate
ksaxe@vols.utk.edu
(865) 235-7311

1.3 Email to Potential Participant

Hello (Potential Participant's Name),

My name is Kelsie Saxe and I'm a master's student studying Recreation and Sport Management. I am currently working on my thesis and I am conducting research regarding the lived experience of the female student-athlete.

I am interested in conducting in-depth interviews with female student-athletes in their third or fourth year of eligibility that have not transferred from another four year institution. There would be one interview and it would take approximately an hour.

If you would be interested in participating in the study please let me know and we can set up a time to get together early next semester. I hope to talk with you soon!

Best,

Kelsie Saxe

University of Tennessee, Knoxville
M.S. Recreation and Sport Management (May 2015)
Graduate Teaching Associate
ksaxe@vols.utk.edu
(865) 235-7311

APPENDIX E: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

The Lived Experience of the Collegiate Female Student-Athlete

INTRODUCTION

You are invited to participate in this research study which purpose is to explore the lived experiences of female student-athletes.

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

Your interview will last approximately one hour and will focus on your experiences as a female student-athlete. The interviews will be digitally recorded to ensure accuracy of your responses. After the recording has been transferred to my personal computer, the digital recording will be deleted. Additionally, the transcript of your interview will be emailed to you for you to check and make any changes that you may feel necessary. You will have two weeks from the time you receive the email to make any changes. You may also call or email the researcher to discuss any changes.

RISKS

Minimal risk is involved in this research. Participants are asked to recall their lived experiences. Lived experiences can be hard to discuss at times and this can cause discomfort. However, all participants' names and school affiliations will remain confidential. Participants may choose a pseudonym to represent themselves for any direct quotations that may be used. The researcher will read the Informed Consent Form aloud before the interview begins and the participants will sign the form as well as give a verbal approval on the digital recording.

Participants will be informed that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty. The researcher will destroy all information of theirs immediately after the study is completed.

The researchers will have access to all notes, transcripts and recordings. Anyone else asked to review the notes will sign a Pledge of Confidentiality. All information will be kept on a flash drive and be in the personal possession of the researcher. The informed consent forms and verbal consent voice files will be kept separate from the transcripts and recordings. These will be under lock and key in HPER144.

BENEFITS

The benefit of participating is exploring and reflecting on one's own experience as a female student-athlete and helping others gain understanding of this population's experiences.

_____ Participant's initials

IRB NUMBER: UTK IRB-14-01874 XP IRB APPROVAL DATE: 03/27/2015 IRB
EXPIRATION DATE: 12/01/2015

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every attempt will be made to keep the information in this study confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to persons involved the study unless participants specifically give permission to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports, which could link participants to the study. Pseudonyms will be used in all references to the participants. All recordings and transcripts will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

COMPENSATION

No compensation will be given to participants.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study,) you may contact the researcher, Kelsie Saxe, at 1914 Andy Holt Ave Knoxville, TN 37996-2700 at (865) 235-7311, or her advisor, Dr. Rob Hardin, at (865) 974-1281. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Office of Research Compliance Officer Sonya Sullivan at ssulli20@utk.edu or at (865) 974-7697.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form.

I give my permission for Kelsie Saxe to use the interview and information already collected for her research.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

IRB NUMBER: UTK IRB-14-01874 XP IRB APPROVAL DATE: 03/27/2015 IRB
EXPIRATION DATE: 12/01/2015

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Ask participant for questions regarding informed consent form.

If no questions, obtain verbal approval and signature of informed consent form.

Opening Question:

1. Can you tell me about your experience as a student-athlete at the University of (institution)?

Probe Questions: Based on the experiences and responses of the participants.

2. Near end: What meaning, if any, does your student-athlete experience have?

VITA

Kelsie Saxe is a graduate student at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. She currently works as a graduate teaching associate where she teaches classes within the Physical Education Activity Program. Additionally, she is a manager for the swimming and diving team.

Kelsie is originally from Portland, Oregon, however she moved with her family to Arizona, Tennessee, Wisconsin and attended college at the University of Idaho. At Idaho she competed on the swimming and diving team where she served as the team captain her senior year. Her professional interests include student-athlete development and coaching.