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BALANCING THE DEMANDS OF COLLEGE AND ATHLETICS: FIRST-GENERATION
FEMALE STUDENT-ATHLETES' PERCEPTION OF THE COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

by

ADRIENNE RODRIGUEZ

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of the University of the Incarnate Word
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF THE INCARNATE WORD

December 2019

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Adrienne Diane Rodriguez

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Antonio and Sylvia Rodriguez, who worked hard and selflessly sacrificed their lives to provide an opportunity for their children to attain a college degree. My parents taught me the value of hard work, to remain humble, and the importance of faith to carry you through the best of times, but more importantly the worst of times. During the dissertation journey, there were many unexpected turns and pitfalls, but it has been through the constant faith of my parents that I finally reached my destination.

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Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to the courageous women that participated in this study. Your contributions to the study have provided a voice for future female athletes and has contributed to the body of knowledge of research for women in athletics. This research would not have occurred without your willingness to openly share your personal experiences as female college athletes and first-generation college students.

BALANCING THE DEMANDS OF COLLEGE AND ATHLETICS: FIRST-GENERATION
FEMALE STUDENT-ATHLETES' PERCEPTION OF THE COLLEGE EXPERIENCE.

Adrienne Diane Rodriguez

University of the Incarnate Word, 2019

The purpose of this study was to understand a first-generation female perspective regarding their athletic experiences while balancing the demands of college. The launch of the 1972 Title IX regulation education amendment arrived at a pivotal time for women in sports. It was not until the arrival of the 1972 Title IX amendment of equal funding for women's athletic programs that an increase in the number of women began to compete in collegiate sports. As more women began to participate in sports, pressures to perform both competitively and academically presented different challenges for female athletes during their collegiate career. For the first-generation female college student, additional barriers may be present impeding their academic success.

Review of the literature reveals topics specific to the academic success of the first-generation female student-athlete in collegiate sports exposes a significant gap in existing literature. The review of the literature also suggests lack of relevant studies may be partly due to the delay of equal acceptance of women's participation in collegiate sports (Trull, 2015).

The approach for this study was a qualitative research design. The research protocol consisted of semi-structured interviews with 6 former female collegiate student-athletes. The theoretical framework applied during the research was guided by two leading theorists in student college development; Nevitt Sanford's (1962) theory of readiness, challenge, and support, and Chickering and Reisser's (1993) seven vectors of student development.

Participants were asked 10 open-ended questions during a one-on-one interview. All responses were transcribed and shared with participants during a second meeting to validate the transcriptions accurately reflected their responses. The transcriptions were analyzed into several cycles of categories. Twelve reoccurring categories emerged from the cluster of data and were reviewed for reoccurring patterns and themes using the Saldana's (2016) Values Coding of values, attitudes, and beliefs. Reflective analysis of the data yielded 4 principal themes that emerged from the study:

- athletic experience is multifaceted
- family support is significant to success
- athletic expectations are overwhelming
- navigating the college experience

Results of the data revealed participants valued the college experience and the life lessons learned as a student and athlete. Their participation in athletic programs required a significant sacrifice of their time to meet the demands of both domains in college. The former collegiate female athletes shared their experience taught them self-discipline, commitment, mental toughness, and how to overcome adversity. Participants also shared the challenges they encountered motivated their persistence to complete graduation.

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Chapter One: Overview

Context of the Study

The launch of the 1972 Title IX regulation education amendment arrived at a pivotal time for women in sports. “Title IX recognized the uniqueness of intercollegiate athletics by permitting colleges and universities to have separate and equal athletic programs for women” (Hogshead-Makar & Zimbalist, 2007, p.2). As more women began to participate in sports, pressures to perform both competitively and academically presented different challenges for female athletes during their collegiate career. For a female student-athlete to be successful in both academics and athletics, the student must learn to find a reasonable balance to maintain eligibility to play and remain on schedule for graduation. As more women assume roles on athletic teams, the more culturally diverse the teams become in collegiate sports programs. This growth prompts the urgency to develop systematic methods of support for the underrepresented and marginalized student-athlete population.

Student-Athletes

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is the governing body responsible for regulating athletics, conferences, and divisions within an institution. For a student-athlete to participate at the collegiate level, the student must meet mandated criteria for acceptance into the organization. Expectations of the NCAA organization mandate student-athletes meet the competitive goals athletically but also maintain the required academic standards to participate in the collegiate sport. While some student-athletes perform exceptionally in both the classroom and their respective sport, there is evidence to support that student-athletes are struggling to maintain required academic standards and complete a four-year degree. Frank (2008) draws attention to the term “student-athlete” as a hyphenated title categorizing the athlete as “students

struggling to balance their athletic and academic roles of identity” (p. 2). Sharp and Sheilley (2008), proponents for student-athletes, support the claim by advocating for student-athlete academic success by encouraging educators “to safeguard and balance the opportunity for student-athletes’ academic success in collegiate programs by nurturing and assisting the student-athlete” in the classroom (p. 112).

First-Generation Students in Higher Education

In academia, the profile of the first-generation student (FGS) is characteristically classified as a non-native speaker, financially in a lower socio-economic classification, and disadvantaged due to the limited college experiences of the parents. Lohfink and Paulsen (2005) describe that the lack of knowledge by the parents may leave first-generation college students feeling ostracized by the academic community since students are unaware of “the social and economic characteristics that constrain their educational opportunities” (p. 418). For the student, the lack of understanding by the parent inhibits their ability to provide support for the student and has a significant impact on their college experience.

Scholars agree that the lack of experience by parents negatively affects the success of the student. Collier and Morgan (2008) emphasize the importance of first-generation college students obtaining a deeper understanding of how to absorb the rigorous coursework, expectations in academia, and aptitude before mastering the “college student” role (p. 1). It is believed that if a student is unable to immerse in the college experience, then the success of the student is at risk of not meeting the expectations to satisfy the required academic standards. Engle and Tinto (2008) link lower socioeconomic status to lack of engagement from the student, reporting “low-income and first-generation students are less likely to be engaged in the academic and social experience fostering the success in college” (p. 3). Jehangir (2010) reports that a first-

generation student performs at a lower level of academic competency and performance. Jehangir (2010) contributes the lower performance to be partly due to the multiple interruptions of balancing multiple roles between family, academics, and the necessity to secure employment to satisfy the cost of living and educational expenses. Choy (2001) describes the greatest challenge for the first-generation college student is to overcome the intimidation of enrolling in a college program. Choy (2001) further advises that it is essential the first-generation student remains persistent and enrolled in college to attain a four-year degree.

Women in Athletics

The 1972 Title IX regulation education amendment emerged as a response to protecting all people from discrimination based on gender in educational programs receiving federally funded financial assistance. The statute supports equality of all resources regardless of gender. Additionally, “Title IX recognizes the uniqueness of intercollegiate athletics by permitting colleges or universities to have separate athletic programs for men and women” (Hogshead-Makar & Zimbalist, 2007, p. 2). Before the Title IX mandate, males dominated most of the participation in sports, while less than 1 percent of funding in women’s sports was available to operate athletic programs. Title IX requirements implemented key changes in funding for women’s participation in collegiate sports, resulting in a dramatic increase of women athletes from 32,000 in 1972 to 110,000 by 1996. As of 1997, “the number of women enrolled in advance degree programs had dramatically increased” (Kennedy, 2010, p. 78). “Women in intercollegiate sports have increased greatly since 1972, and today a record 193,232 women compete, over six times the pre-title IX rate” (National Women’s Law Center, 2012, p. 1). Currently, in the National College Athletic Association (NCAA), more than half of the student-athletes enrolled are women receiving only 44% of the athletic opportunities. According to

recent statistics (2012), “women are still not granted the opportunity to participate on a level playing field” but continue to take advantage of opportunities in collegiate programs (National Women’s Law Center, 2012, p. 2).

Statement of the Problem

When examining student academic success, Sparkman, Malding, and Roberts (2012) led a study exploring the non-cognitive predictors of the emotional and social intelligence of traditional students. The scholars propose that to achieve academic success, students must first have the aptitude to navigate through the transition from high school to college. Findings of the study reveal that “multiple variables appear to influence student success and retention, making new relationships, adjusting to new relationships, learning to study, and dealing with independence” (Sparkman, Malding, & Roberts, 2012, p. 645). The pressure to adapt to the multiple variables may prove to be a challenging accomplishment for traditional students; for student-athletes, a higher standard of performance is expected both athletically and academically.

Research specific to male participation in an athletics program is vast and can be partly attributed to the longevity of men’s participation in sports (Trull, 2015). Current studies specific to the academic success of the first-generation female student-athlete in collegiate sports exposes a significant gap in the existing literature. The absence of valid studies for first-generation female student-athletes may be a result of the delay of equal acceptance of women in collegiate sports (Trull, 2015). It was not until the arrival of the 1972 Title IX amendment of equal funding that supports for women’s athletic programs were available and an influx of women began competing in sports. The mandated amendment provided new opportunities for women to participate in multiple programs and prohibited the discrimination of any person in education, athletics, and employment opportunities.

This study intends to contribute to the knowledge base of women in athletics by filling the gap of accessible research related to the academic success of the first-generation female student-athlete. As the number of female collegiate athletes participating in sports increases, it is essential to the success of the women to conduct research that represents the segment of women who were not previously recognized in the literature. Concerted efforts must also be made to explore topics relevant to the new generation of diverse female athletes emerging in sports.

The research for this study explored the experiences from the lens of the first-generation female student-athlete. During the research, careful attention was made to understand the life of the student-athlete while mastering the “college student role” and participating in sports. Results from the study identified key systems facilitating their success both academically and athletically, while also investigating the impact the role of administrators, athletic directors, coaches, and faculty members had on the first-generation female student-athlete college experience.

Researcher’s Story and Experience

To raise awareness of the experiences from the lens of a first-generation female student-athlete, I chose a qualitative design to direct the study. The goal of the study was to gather first-hand accounts from the student-athlete in both academics and athletics. As an educator working with students in higher education for over nearly twenty years, I have observed many students arrive on campus with unique and diverse academic skill sets. Some students arrive with strong study skills, parental support, and the maturity to engage with professors and peers. Comparatively, other students struggle with day-to-day operations in the academic world due to a lack of academic preparedness and family support.

As an athletic administrator, adjunct faculty, and a member of student affairs employed by a small private university, I have personally observed the multiple challenges students encounter as first year “students” and “athletes.” Some of the challenge’s student-athletes routinely encountered include the following:

- meeting academic requirements
- financial issues to attend a private university
- faculty perceptions of student-athletes
- family support
- peer pressure
- maintaining eligibility
- being athletically prepared to ensure adequate playing time
- set-backs due to unanticipated injuries
- traveling during the academic season
- meeting the demands of coaches
- graduating on time with their peers

The overall design of the study explored elements of their college experience that facilitated the overall academic success while recognizing challenges that may have impeded their progress. During the interviews, the women openly shared events and people who were influential in their college experience and facilitated their journey to graduation. Inquiry into the academic success of student-athletes must not be limited to one solitary definition. There are many dynamics to consider when exploring the academic success of students in higher education. To better understand from the lens of the student-athlete, I chose to research subjects self-identified as first-generation female student-athletes meeting the criteria to participate in the

study. While there are numerous studies exploring athletics, research specific to the first-generation female student-athletes' academic success reveals a significant gap in the existing literature. How do some female student-athletes manage the multiple demands of academics, athletics, and family, while others lose their focus and struggle academically? The opportunity to participate in both academics and athletics is considered a privilege, and for many defines who they are as a person. When female student-athletes are unable to meet the expectations in both domains of their college experience, where do they seek guidance? Do they search for the support within the academic support systems? Are the academic supports systems equipped to specialize in the needs of the first-generation female student-athlete? When students cannot manage the dualities of roles, does it leave the student at a loss of purpose or personal goals and overall failure?

As an administrator and instructor for many of these students, I have the opportunity and privilege to participate in events and activities from an academic and athletic perspective. These daily interactions provide me with an opportunity to engage the student-athletes at a different level than their coaches. As a member of the university community, I am passionate and committed to my obligation to make sense of any challenges that affect the student's achievement. As an educator, I am committed to providing support and resources to facilitate their learning, and I am continuously seeking new strategies to keep the students engaged so that they will accomplish their goal for attending college: graduation. As the author of the study, I devoted my efforts to represent the women in this study respectfully and truthfully by accurately presenting the themes acquired from our conversations of their collegiate experience.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the qualitative study is to explore the perceptions of academic success and barriers from the lens of the first-generation female student-athlete.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to understand a first-generation female perspective regarding their athletic experiences while balancing the demands of college. To understand the perspective of the student-athletes, two research questions were developed:

- 1) How do first-generation female student-athletes balance the demands of college and athletics?
- 2) What are the barriers encountered during the college experience?

Overview of Research Design

Merriam and Tisdale (2016) state that in basic qualitative research, “the study is based on the belief that knowledge is constructed by people in an ongoing fashion as they engage in and make meaning of an activity, experience, or phenomenon” (p. 23). The approach for the study was a basic interpretive design. In this approach, the researcher aimed to understand the experiences of individuals in a particular setting or how they made meaning of their life. The basic interpretive design will provide rich descriptive accounts of a phenomenon from the perspective of the individuals studied (Jutasen, 2007). In the basic interpretive qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument inductively exploring the worldviews of participants (Pereira, 2016).

Definition of Terms

Scholars believe academic success can be achieved for a student when the desired outcome is founded on five influential variables: student retention, educational attainment,

academic achievement, student advancement, and holistic development. Student success, according to Cuseo (2008), is a holistic phenomenon that embraces multiple dimensions of personal development in congruence with the goals of higher education (p. 4). The five influential variables are defined as follows:

- **Academic Success:** the achievement of students completing satisfactory or superior levels of academic performance as they progress through and complete their college experience (Cuseo, 2008, p. 4).
- **Academic Support:** a wide variety of instructional methods, educational services, or school resources provided to students in the effort to help them accelerate their learning progress, catch up with their peers, meet learning standards, or generally succeed in school (Great School Partnership, 2014).
- **Holistic Development:** students develop as whole persons intellectually, emotionally, socially, ethically, physically, and spiritually while completing their college experience (Cuseo, 2008, p. 4).
- **First-generation College Student:** a student entering college whose parent(s) or guardian(s) have not completed a four-year college degree.
- **Student-Athlete:** an enrolled student who participates in an organized competitive sport sponsored by the college/university in which he/she is enrolled and certified through a national athletic association to play in the collegiate sport.
- **Title IX:** 1972 legislation allowing equal participation and funding in all educational sponsored activities for males and females.

- Motivation: “a belief in one’s ability to perform academically, as well as satisfaction and challenge associated with the performance” (Prevatt et al., 2011, p.27).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework is an essential component in building a qualitative design to inform the study and guide the research process, of analysis, and discussion (Creswell, 2007). Nevitt Sanford’s (1962b) psychosocial developmental model of challenge and support is an appropriate framework to explore the readiness and academic success of the female student-athlete. Gardner (2009) describes Sanford’s (1962b) challenge and support theory as the catalyst in examining “how a student grows as a result of participating in the college experience” (p. 15). The application of the theoretical framework by Psychologist Nevitt Sanford’s explorations of student development in higher education best supports the framework since the construct of the theory is founded on personal shared lived experiences from the lens of the student while attending college.

Developed in the early 1960s, Sanford built his theory from Eric Erickson’s 1959 theory of life-span development. The development model evolved as a need to assess the growth phenomena of female college students attending Vassar College in 1962. Gardner (2009) describes Sanford’s (1962a) findings of the study as a “response to coping with emerging situations” in need of support to develop the student intellectually and emotionally (p. 15). The findings from his study postulated that student development would thrive for female college students if provided an equal balance of challenge and support. According to Gardner (2009), theories examined how college students approach new or unforeseen challenges, and how their response positively or negatively affects the student. When responding to a challenge positively,

the experience has the potential to enhance new growth and development. A negative response to a challenge impeded the growth of the student and contributed to the regression of their overall development during the college experience.

Sanford's (1962b) development theory examines three evolving conditions:

- Readiness: the maturity and preparedness of the student
- Challenge: the necessary component to help guide the student through personal development
- Support: providing an environment that is encouraging and allows the student to explore the conditions of his/her identity in a safe setting

In higher education, "there are multiple conceptual frameworks used to assess learning and development of college students" (King & Howard-Hamilton, 2000, p. 19). Nevitt Sanford's (1962b) development model best suits this study, as the framework provides congruency in understanding the lived experiences of female student athlete's dual role as a student and athlete. The development model is useful in understanding how a student-athlete navigated in two different organizations while meeting the demands of each system. According to Sanford (1962b), the foundation of the theory supports the construct that for growth to occur, the student must have a balanced amount of challenge and support appropriate for the task. When a student receives too much support, the opportunity for the student to learn is limited. Overabundant support inhibits the autonomy of the students' ability to grow and develop on their own. When presented with an excess challenge, some students become frustrated and give up on the challenge. Lastly, according to Sanford's (1962b) theory, the element of readiness of a student suggests that an individual student will not grow until they are physically or psychologically ready to grow. Sanford (1962b) maintains that growth occurs in students when provided

challenges and support equally through a variety of experiences both academically and personally. If a student understands their own identity, and positively accepts the support of the environment, then the student has the aptitude to succeed.

Significance of the Study

Intercollegiate athletic programs throughout the nation have played a historical and controversial role in the academic arena as early as the late 1800s (Engstrom, Sedlacek, & McEwen, 1995). Throughout the years, as collegiate sports have gained popularity among Americans, many scholars and critics in higher education have questioned the legitimacy of the marriage of sports and academics at the institutional level. Today, a growing number of institutions across the country support the culture of athletics as a significant branding of a university to encourage spirit and connection among the campus community. On some campuses, not all members of the community support the role of athletics within an institution and the students participating in the program. Some faculty have a negative stereotype and prejudice toward student-athletes simply due to the status of the student on athletic teams (Baucom & Lantz, 2001).

Findings of the study will contribute to academia in the areas of student retention, student success, student life, athletics, first-generation college students, and women in athletics. The demands on female student-athletes to perform competitively in their respective sport while maintaining academics and family obligations may be the cause for distraction and underachievement in the college. Unlike the traditional student, the first-generation student has strong ties to traditional family values that may require the student to work to support the family or act as a primary caregiver for a family member (Jehangir, 2010). An additional challenge a first-generation female student-athlete may encounter is maintaining the competitive edge in a

field dominated by men. Today, this may or may not prove to be a challenging feat for women; yet in some athletic domains, equity to participate on a level playing field presents some challenges for women in sports.

Targeted audiences for the proposed study are first-generation female student-athletes. Benefactors from the results of the study include female student-athletes, administrators, athletic teams, faculty members, coaches, policymakers within the institution, and athletic conference administrators. The women participating in the study were provided the opportunity to share their voice in an arena that is typically male-dominated and underrepresented by women in athletic administrative positions. This opportunity will provide insight into the challenges young women experience as athletes and as first-generation college students. Results from the study delivered evidence of challenges encountered from the lens of the female student-athlete. The responses from the former student-athletes illuminated and clarified significant issues from the perspective of the women and provided a better understanding on how to develop effective support systems for the current generation of women in athletics struggling to maintain satisfactory academic standards while mastering the “college student role” (Collier & Morgan, 2008).

In higher education, best practices determining the contributing factors of high attrition rates among first-generation college students is essential to the academic success of any student. The National Survey of Student Engagement (2007) reports an urgency to enlist a process of evaluation and assessment for students early in their academic career. DeBerard, Speilsmans, and Julka (2004) identify the significance of innovative student retention processes as a crucial indicator in the academic success of students since the “timing of a significant proportion of college student attrition occurs within the first year” (p. 66). Ishanti (2006) supports retention

efforts by recognizing the necessity for an adjustment timeframe within a student's first year of college by advocating the need to establish an analysis of both short-term and long-term review of their academics to support retention efforts.

Limitations

The study is a basic interpretive qualitative design focusing on the perspective from the lens of a first-generation female athlete. Participants were student-athlete alumnae selected from a private Catholic university participating in the National Athletic Intercollegiate Association (NAIA) Red River Conference. The study was conducted within a small institution in the Southwestern region of the United States.

Summary

In summary, the purpose of this study was to provide an opportunity for first-generation female student-athletes to share their experience of balancing their role as a student and athlete. The qualitative design guided the researcher to explore the phenomena leading to the academic success of a first-generation female student-athlete. According to Green (2007), the goal of qualitative research is to invoke participants to "share stories of engagement in a natural setting that allow for multiple perspectives to emerge embodied in a holistic, complex, and truthful description" (p.42). By using the framework of theorist Nevitt Sanford's psychosocial development model, the findings of the study revealed the significance of readiness, challenge, and support in understanding academic, social, and athletic development within the lived experiences and perspective of female student-athletes.

Chapter Two: Review of Related Literature

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perception of academic success and barriers from the lens of the first-generation female student-athlete. To understand the experience of first-generation female athletes, it is significant to understand the complex historical context of athletics and academics. Current research relevant to the complexities of college athletics, first-generation students, women in sports, and the academic success of student-athletes will deepen the understanding of the subject and themes related to the study. This chapter will include a discussion reviewing current literature related to the student-athlete experience, student services for athletes, academic concerns, NCAA regulations, first-generation students, female athletes, and will serve as resources relating student-athlete success in college and completion of a four-year degree.

Student-Athlete vs. Non-Student Athlete's Academic Experience

Most students attending college are faced with multiple challenges throughout their college career. For the student-athlete, the amount of challenges experienced differs from non-athletes (Bontemps, 2013). Broughton and Neyer (2001) state that student-athletes have unique and complex demands arising from their involvement in competitive sports (p. 47). Pinkerton, Hinz, and Barrow (1989) describe that most college student-athletes are at higher risk of experiencing various amounts of stress during the collegiate career. Settles, Sellers, and Damas (2002) describe student-athletes as having two roles, one as a student and one as an athlete. Current research confirms “that college student-athletes endure multiple complications throughout their college life” (Bontemps, 2013, p. 1). Watt and Moore (2001) support the claim of scholars by describing student-athletes as individuals faced with conflicting academic and social pressures differing from the traditional non-athlete college student. According to Watt and

Moore (2001), the challenge in balancing both roles for the student-athletes, “creates additional stress for the student and negatively influences their social adjustment, intellectual growth, and the ability to examine potential career choices” (p. 7). Watt and Moore (2001) do not discount the roles of the traditional student college experience but question critic’s lack of interest to broaden their perspective of the student-athlete experience. Studies reveal that incoming freshman student-athletes describe their first year as challenging, and recount how acclimating to the new environment intensifies their stress levels (Wilson & Pritchard, 2005). Scholars also recognize that the demands of athletics for the student-athletes create additional stress related to time management and managing the multiple sport-related issues linked to competitive performance, injuries, team dynamics, and the relationship with the coaching staff (Lu, Hsu, Chan, Cheen, & Kao, 2012).

Student-Athletes

Potuto and O’Hanlon (2007) conducted a national study to investigate the college experience of a cohort of 2,414 student-athletes. The participants in the study were student-athletes playing at an NCAA Division 1A school and who were upperclassman with a minimum of 85 credit hours. Overall results from the study reveal that student-athletes were satisfied with their collegiate experience. When participants were asked to share the importance of completing graduation, “93% of the student-athletes reported it was very important to obtain a degree, while 6.8% reported graduation completion important or somewhat important” (Potuto & O’Hanlon, 2007, p. 4). In the study, student-athletes were also asked if their participation in sports contributed to their personal development. Most responses were positive, and students viewed their participation in athletics as a valuable part of their development in the following areas: social, emotional, and support from a family with a 96% response rate. Results from the survey

reported response rates from the following support groups with whom the athletes interacted during college: teammates (80%), roommates (74%), classmates (41%), and other friends (66%) (Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007). Results also revealed student-athletes participation in athletics did not negatively affect their cumulative grade point average, and a larger percentage of males, 18%, than female respondents self-identify first as an athlete rather than a good student. Meanwhile "82% of the females reported athletics interferes with academic work revealing greater interest in active participation class" (Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007, p. 6). Statistical data from the 2007 National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) survey also revealed that overall; females had more positive responses than males. Limitations of the NSSE study only surveyed student-athlete upperclassman who completed a minimum of 85 semester hours. Surveys of the first-year student-athlete population, students who are statistically at greater risk academically, were not included in the study. Limitations of the study failed to include insight into the "dissatisfaction of some student-athletes who may have dropped out of the program before earning the required hours to participate in the study" (Potuto & O'Hanlon, p. 14). Green (2007), an advocate for first-year data collection, supports the limitation by taking caution when gathering data by encouraging scholars to conduct studies within the first year of the academic experience to ensure an accurate measure of challenges impeding the academic success of a student is revealed. Results from the findings of Potuto and O'Hanlon (2007) suggest that "even though student-athletes value the overall college experience and believe that athletics participation contributes in important ways to their personal an academic development, they still may be shortchanged on the academic end because of their time commitments to the sport" (Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007, p.4).

Student Services for Athletes

Academic student support systems significantly impact the overall college success and experience of the student-athlete. Larger NCAA Division 1 schools are institutions with budgetary resources to staff a professional team specially trained in academic achievement for athletes. Broughton and Neyer (2001) describe the academic support centers as focusing on three areas of development for the student-athlete: academic scheduling, academic tutoring, and time management. Recent academic guidelines mandated by the NCAA prompted the academic reform requirement, yet for many institutions lack resources to mentor the students. Jolly (2008) states “while NCAA schools provide academic support for student-athletes, few can provide significant study hall space and computing resources” (p. 145). College athletic financial resources among smaller institutions are restrictive and, in most cases, institutions must rely on professional staff within a student affairs division to provide support. Student affairs professional staff members are trained to work with most students in the areas of mental health, wellness, academic support, and transitional issues, yet there are limitations from the student-athlete’s perspective. Generally, smaller institutions rely solely on the support from student affairs professionals with the aptitude to recognize the challenges of student-athletes (Watt & Moore, 2001). In most cases, student affairs professionals lack the appropriate training to recognize the demands and challenges faced by student-athletes.

History of Athletics in Higher Education

In the United States, the introduction of competitive intercollegiate sports began as early as 1864. It was not until the late 1880s that collegiate sports became a sensation within the media, resulting in more coverage and overall public interest. As the popularity of the sport continued to increase, a surge in media coverage progressed; this led to multiple corporate

sponsorships and lucrative interest in collegiate football by large corporate sponsorships (Watt & Moore, 2001). As the newly inaugurated sport continued to evolve, the competitive nature and intensity of the game increased and was cause for multiple injuries and, in some cases, fatalities. This controversy prompted many colleges and universities to discontinue the sport as the magnitude of liabilities increased. Theodore Roosevelt (1905) summoned a committee of university officials in athletics to develop an association that would initiate changes in the game to protect students from dangerous and exploitive athletics practices of the era (Morrison, 2010). The organization began in 1906 as the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States (IAAUS) and consisted of 62 institutions in higher education. By 1910, after multiple reformations, the NCCA was finally established and is currently the official governing body for collegiate athletics.

From the inception of the NCAA, President Theodore Roosevelt's demand to reform college football had been turbulent, and the marriage between higher education and intercollegiate athletics has been historically tumultuous (Watt & Moore, 2001). W.H. Cowley (1999) summarizes a largely legitimate concern questioning the social order of the organization in relation to higher education, "How can an institution in the social order whose primary purpose is the development of the intellectual life, concurrently serve as an agency to promote business, industry, journalism, and organized athletics on an extensive commercial basis?" (p.495). Moreover, the report also examined whether a "university could objectively concentrate its attention on securing teams that win, without impairing the sincerity and vigor of its intellectual purpose" (Cowley, 1999, p. 495). Collegiate sports have become increasingly popular in America as a pastime in our society. The success in a championship can provide a

culture of victory and has the influence to ignite alumni support, a strong fan base, while simultaneously promoting significant interest from potential benefactors (Cowley, 1999).

Academic Concern

To participate in an athletic program, student-athletes must maintain a 2.0-grade point average in core courses, be currently enrolled as a full-time student at a college and/or university and pass through the NCAA clearinghouse to be a certified student-athlete (National Collegiate Athletic Association [NCAA], 2019). Ferris, Finster, and McDonald (2004) expose multiple conditions in which athletic programs have failed to uphold ethical obligations mandated by the NCAA. The scholars blame the apathy of universities for not enforcing mandated requirements of athletic governing bodies and not safeguarding the opportunity of quality education for student-athletes. Since the inception of athletics in higher education, athletics has transformed many institutional programs into a high-profile form of entertainment and visibility.

Successful athletic programs routinely hire seasoned coaches with a national winning record to allure talented and competitive student-athlete recruits by offering prospective athletes with generous scholarships. Once a student has committed and signed to a university, the student-athlete is then assigned a role as an ambassador for the university. In many circumstances, some student-athletes have a larger-than-life status on campus. This role has the potential to positively or negatively affect the student-athlete. Characteristically, the elite status creates an image of superiority by placing them at a higher level than non-athletes, thus generating additional pressure to succeed in a larger than life system while maintaining academic standards. These educational discrepancies have led many to question the integrity of some athletic programs and critics have arguably identified that the substantial oversights are evident with the lack of academic preparedness of student-athletes. Ferris et al. (2004) specifically note

that institutional accountability should be held to a higher standard and viewed as an obligatory duty and responsibility to the institution of higher learning. Most critics believe that lack of structure, liability, and responsibility within athletic organizations is a disservice to the student-athlete and considerably diminishes the academic integrity of any institution.

Gayles, Rockenbach, and Davis (2012) support the rapid growth of concern by many of academia's faculty, who believe that participation in intercollegiate athletics may limit student learning and personal development in key areas. Today, many scholars and critics question the financial importance of athletics in academia. Opponents are also of the conviction that programs supporting the *win at all cost* attitude perpetuates academic scandals, plagues college sports programs, and ultimately reflects misguided values and behaviors of a troubled institution. These misdirected actions contradict one of the fundamental goals of higher education: social responsibility. Critics also argue that categorizing the student-athlete to celebrity status on campus is cause for inequities among non-student athletes and prompts greater concern of student favoritism in intercollegiate athletic programs. Through favoritism, a divide among students establishes a separation of culture on college campuses by isolating student-athletes from their peers. These distractions can be detrimental to the academic success of any student, in addition to negatively impacting the core values of education.

Faculty Perception of Athletes

Intercollegiate athletic programs throughout the nation have played a historical and controversial role in academics as early as the late 1800s (Engstrom, Sedlacek, & McEwen, 1995). Today, a growing number of institutions across the country support the culture of athletics as a significant branding for a university and encourages spirit within the campus. According to Meyer (2005), several key faculty members have questioned the rigor of academic programs

with the delivery of athletics in a university setting. Mahoney (2011) outlines numerous studies that categorize athletic programs as institutionalized operating systems that are chronically the center of the debate and under scrutiny by faculty members and administrators.

The integration of athletics and academia have maintained a long-held controversial connection in higher education. Some faculty members contend there will never be balance nor compatibility due to the lack of academic rigor associated with athletics and student-athletes (Meyer, 2005). For the dissatisfied faculty members, the questionable and commercialized moral standards generate distrust among some faculty members. While there have been several prominent early educational leaders who have probed into the academic responsibility of institutions, it has been reported that some faculty members have intentionally disconnected and disengaged with the student-athlete in the classroom (Ferris et al., 2004). Lumpkin (2008) attributes some of the lack of engagement as partially linked to the professional or personal responsibilities of a faculty member. Yet, Lumpkin (2008) also reports that the fundamental cause for disengagement can be related to the lack of transparency within the administration, lack of accessibility to the necessary data needed to enact any change, lack of inclusiveness from other departments, and the propensity of the athletic departments to function as a commercialized business. Lumpkin (2008) also argues that the unsettling conditions between athletics and faculty generates an apathetic attitude among faculty members, resulting in an increasing disinterest to support the athletic program and the student-athletes.

NCAA Academic Changes

According to Adler and Adler (1991), the intensity, time, and energy required of student-athletes often result in students neglecting their academic responsibilities. Student-athletes must meet the expectations of the team to succeed on the team. Some scholars believe

that coaches place greater emphasis on physical development and less on academic progress. Nite (2012) addresses the awareness of the multiple demands required of student-athletes and questions the importance of athletics for universities and student-athletes. The NCAA (1990) unveiled a program to encourage colleges and universities to explore and expand a curriculum fostering student-athlete development because of the turmoil between the academic and athletic communities. In 2000, the NCAA's initiative began to challenge universities to view the student from a different perspective and search for ways to cultivate and protect the academic performance of the athletes. Many universities were in support of the reform. Larger institutions took the lead in the reform by investing in additional academic support personnel to accommodate the needs of the student-athletes.

The reformation of the NCAA did not move forward without resistance. In a survey of NCAA institutions, a recent report identified an alarming disparity in academic support from various universities. The disproportion of resources to support academic centers is a significant reason for the imbalance. Jolly (2008) challenges the inequities amongst institutions and pinpoints a significant disproportion in academic support and lack of financial funding due to the lack of appropriate resources to build dedicated study centers and enhance the academic success of student-athletes. Findings exposed multiple financial inequities among institutions, leading to deficiencies in accommodating the student-athletes to meet mandated requirements in the NCAA reformation. Jolly (2008) reports that “69.2 percent of all NCAA institutions staff a minimum of three academic advisors trained to understand the NCAA rules” (p. 146). Jolly (2008) clarifies that “70 percent of the institutions are not outfitted to employ a study skills specialist, who in most cases, is a fundamental component in the learning development to meet the needs of the student-athlete” (p. 146). According to Jolly (2008), many institutions are lacking financial

support to build student academic success centers and are risking the potential for recruiting power, student-athlete retention, and academic success.

Participation in Athletics and College

Howard-Hamilton and Sina (2001) state, “when student-athletes attend college, they are provided opportunities to interact with a diverse group of individuals from various racial, ethnical, and cultural backgrounds” (p. 35). Howard-Hamilton and Sina (2001) report interactions with a diverse group of peers positively influence the learning of student-athletes, initiates critical thinking, and allows for opportunities to engage with a unique group of students. Scholars warn the “constant praise and accolades from family, peers, and the media solely based on their performance on the field boosts the ego and can have a lasting negative effect on the psyche of the athlete” (Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001, p. 37). “The support and encouragement might seem positive but when recognition comes only for athletic competence, a person’s entire sense of self-worth begins to hinge on making big plays and winning the game” (Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001, p. 37). Scholars also warn of the net effects of ego-identity when a student-athlete is influenced with superficial success as an identity. The ego identity promoted by society stigmatizes the achievements of the student-athlete by causing a distraction from academic goals and achievement potential (Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001).

The student-athlete experience is not unlike the experience of the traditional student. “Student-athletes must achieve a sense of independence, including autonomy from parents, and their development is often described as moving through autonomy toward interdependence” (Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001, p. 35). Yet, the daily routine of a student-athlete requires multiple interactions with various athletic personnel via practices, games, and coaches. These day-to-day exchanges form strong emotional connections to coaches and athletic staff. The daily

schedule of a student-athlete includes a complex arrangement of meetings, training, practices, study hall, and volunteer activities. Harris (1993) disagrees with the micromanagement of student-athletes, describing the interactions as delaying the student from practicing independence due to “little emotional or physical space to develop autonomy” since the student is managed by a coach throughout their academic career (p. 5).

For the student-athlete, teamwork is the framework for winning. Many athletes learn to speak the same language when communicating strategic play during competition. While this language is successful on the court, it can have a negative effect outside an athletic context. Howard-Hamilton and Sina (2001) recognized that "while athletes can manage physical competencies of their sports achievements and fitness levels, interpersonal competencies might present challenging obstacles, particularly in settings with students who are non-athletes” (p. 37). For the student-athlete, relationships may be difficult to develop since little time is available for the student-athlete to engage in extracurricular activities with non-athletes. Student-athletes condition themselves to compete with a mindset of mental toughness that includes maintaining focus despite injuries, exhaustion, coaches’ expectations, and interactions with teammates.

“The art of verbal and non-verbal communication is also a crucial component to any game setting and a conversation outside the comfort zone of the athlete may be uncomfortable and not part of the student’s frame of reference” (Harris, 1993, p.5) This may lead to some student-athletes having to overcome pre-judgments held by many non-athletes, faculty, and administrators (Harris, 1993, p.5). Some scholars describe student-athletes as “possessing innate athletic superiority but lacking the academic competence or ability for academic success” (Engstrom et al., 1995, p. 217). The scholars agree that by negating the academic ability of the student-athlete, it negatively affects their student and athlete identity.

First-Generation Student-Athletes

According to Warner (2016), a first-generation college student-athlete is concerned with three goals while attending college: acclimating within the community, navigating the duality role of student and athlete, and establishing career goals. Warner (2016) describes the acclimation within the community as the ability to establish their social identity through their relationships with teammates and within their new learning community. The scholar reports social identity is developed through team influence, cohesion within the team, and support from the community. Warner (2016) further describes student-athletes as maintaining two distinct roles: student and athlete. Warner (2016) describes the duality of roles as a “conflicting identity of roles difficult to separate” due to expectations and demands from coaches, teammates, and parents to graduate from college and achieve career goals (p. 21).

There have been significant strides to improve the ease of access to college for first-generation college students. Engle and Tinto (2008) attribute the strides to current graduation completion and retention data available as predictors to keep the students on track for graduation. According to Engle and Tinto (2008), “low-income and first-generation students are less likely to be engaged in the academic and social experiences that foster success in college” (p. 3). In a study released from the National Center for Educational Statistics, it was reported that low-income students were at a higher risk academically, and nearly four times more likely to leave college after the first year than traditional students (Engle & Tinto, 2008). It was also reported, six years later, that nearly half of first-generation students left college without completing a degree (Stebbleton & Soria, 2013). Jenkins, Miyazaki, and Janosik (2009) report that first-generation college students entering college arrive with inadequate academic preparation, and, in some cases, require remedial work.

Jehangir (2010) identifies an astounding number of characterized barriers first-generation students must overcome to succeed in higher education. Jehangir (2010) describes that the first-generation college experience creates additional pressure for the student to meet the expectations of academics while simultaneously meeting the needs of the family and creates conflicting loyalties between the goal of attaining an education and family expectations. This leaves little time to participate in campus activities for social and academic support. The opportunity to participate in extra-curricular activities, such as learning communities, first-year seminars, common book experiences, study abroad opportunities, and other experiences, is available to all students (Jehangir, 2008). For first-generation students, the opportunity to participate is limited due to the multiple obligations the student often carries. Research suggests lack of involvement impedes the potential to develop close interpersonal connections and support with other students. Hellman and Hardback (1997) discovered that first-generation students are at a higher risk for lower self-esteem issues and lack confidence in their academic ability.

Pascarella, Pierson, Wolnaik, and Terenzini (2004) reported in a recent study that first-generation students generally commute, and find it challenging to spend time on campus to create meaningful relationships with peers. Warburton, Bugarin, and Nunez (2001) agree that the lack of academic preparation for the first-generation student places the student at greater disadvantage and pressure to perform.

In a study of first-generation and continuing generations, a survey from a culturally diverse sample of 339 young women revealed greater challenges for the first-generation female student. “Three levels of relationships were examined prior to entering college: (a) level of parents’ emotional and informational support; (b) level of students’ stress; and (c) the relationship between parental support and stress during the transition to college” (Sy, Fong,

Carter, Boehme, & Alpert, 2011, p. 385). “First-generation students are defined as those whose parents have not obtained any formal post-secondary education” (Sy et al., 2011, p. 385). Consistent with current studies related to first-generation students, the results suggest that first-generation female students received less emotional and parent support than continuing-generation students. The support for the latter group of student-athletes likely spawns from the findings that, “continuing-generation students are having at least one parent that had some type of post-secondary” (Sy et al., 2011, p 385). The first-generation students who receive higher levels of parental emotional support reveal that they experienced less stress. Results from the study also reveal that first-generation students faced emotional anxiety when on campus and learning to adapt to a new environment. Sy et al. (2011) report that “when first-generation students gain experience in their first year of college, they encounter challenges that in some circumstances prompt a psychological cultural misalignment” (p. 385).

Some studies identify social support as the fundamental factor in supporting the first-generation student’s success in the college transition. Swenson, Nordstrom, and Hiester (2008) suggest that existing research points to the importance of emphasizing peer and institutional support to ease the transition into college. Currently, limited studies have focused on the interactive role of the family in supporting first-generation students in the first year.

Furstenberg and Hughes (1995) emphasize that parental social support positively affects a student’s life and can significantly reduce negative mental health and academic outcomes for all students. Further evidence suggests that a parent’s involvement in their child’s college preparation plays an essential role, particularly when the student transitions from high school to college (Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996).

Purswell, Yazedjian, and Toews (2008) report that positive parental support of first-generation student's links to specific academic behaviors: active class participation and completing assignments on time. Many researchers support the theory that parental involvement links to lower attrition rates and lower levels of stress for college students in general (Holahan, Valentiner, & Moos, 1994).

Green (2007) advocates for the assessment of the academic success and retention of the underrepresented minority students in higher education. She recognizes the importance of identifying the impact of a qualitative assessment for programs serving underserved students. Green (2007) reveals that "purely quantitative assessment is not a significant measure of a program's effectiveness since qualitative assessments can define a critical measure of tapping into the thought processes of the student and identify issues linked to improved programs for the student" (p. 42). Green (2007) firmly believes qualitative research "befits academic success and retention programs by recognizing the urgency to address the social problems of minority students' departure from colleges" (p. 42). The scholar affirms advocacy programs are paramount for first-generation students and must be made accessible to provide a voice for the academic success of the student. The more opportunities the first-generation student must share their experience, the greater the opportunity to understand the complex and multifaceted nature of the minority student (Green, 2007). Through the implementation of a comprehensive, in-depth understanding, "an institution can better evaluate current, policies, practices, shortcomings, and strengths as a unique benefit to the assessment" (Green, 2007). Finally, Green (2007) states "when approaching the assessment of a program in its natural setting, revelations of truthful and realistic descriptions emerge that are not artificial and devoid of authenticity" (p. 42). Since first-generation students face a myriad of obstacles, it is important to consider the major challenges

that impede their ability to devote adequate study time to complete their studies. Petty (2014) recognizes the significance of connection to encourage students to be successful, but also recognizes there is not one “magical remedy to motivate students since humans are complex individuals” (p. 136). Petty (2014) suggests educators remain cognizant that “we are treading on thin ice when we begin to identify ways to motivate minority individuals” since the needs of first-generation students are based on “internal states of mind that cause individuals to have certain attitudes and behaviors” (p.136). Smith (2018) describes the importance of distinguishing the struggles a first-generation college student may encounter. The scholar confirms it is unfair to assume first-generation college students struggle academically. Smith (2018) further states the absence of understanding may not be a result of not valuing education, but instead may be a result of having a different way of processing and limited knowledge of resources available for assistance to the student.

Female Athletes

The progression of Title IX has not only increased the number of women participating in college sports, but it also raised the level of competition in many sports. Before Title IX, women’s participation in athletics was limited and female athletes had to overcome multiple obstacles to compete. The equalization of women into the athletic venue did not arrive without challenges. Initially, many women were categorized into conventional roles, negative labeling, and experienced negative backlash with the implementation of the new law.

Swalley (2004) explored the relationship between participation in collegiate sports and the student's ability to make mature decisions. In the study, a student-athletes psychosocial development and academic success were evaluated. Swalley’s (2004) report revealed female student-athletes shared mixed opinions related to outcomes to participation in athletics. The

scholar also concluded there is adequate research to support that participation in athletics has been proven to provide students with the significant ability to work cooperatively in a team setting and encourage leadership skills.

While many positive outcomes are resulting from the launch of the Title IX amendment, textual portrayals of female student-athletes have raised thought-provoking questions regarding their achievements. Simiyu (2010) reports women in college sports to receive fewer scholarships, fewer media exposure opportunities, and are subject to ongoing societal bias. Gender equity continues to remain a topic of debate among scholars who continue to examine the portrayal of women in athletics relevant to men's sports. Carty (2005) questions the media's portrayal of women in athletics via television commercials, print ads, and press coverage that frequently focuses on the sexual appeal of female athletes and their "feminine" qualities rather than on their athletic ability and achievements. Recent studies have also questioned the stereotypical portrayals of women. The misrepresentation of women in athletics has negatively impacted the female athlete and has perpetuated an increase in eating disorders, nutritional concerns, sport-related injuries, and sexual harassment (Person, Benson-Quaziana, & Rogers, 2001).

For women in the professional world of athletics, experts in the field agree a disproportionate number of women have yet to break the glass ceiling. According to Gibbs (2019a), "women only hold one out of 4.5 head coaching jobs in collegiate athletics" (p. 2). Acosta and Carpenter (2014) reported that in 2012, 57.1% of the women's teams surveyed were coached by men. Imeson (2017) asserts the absence of female coaches in women's sports hinders the development of support systems for same-sex role models for female-athletes. Lockwood (2011) suggests the presence of more female mentors for same-sex athletes in leadership positions since they can relate to the obstacle's female student-athletes face. Acosta and

Carpenter (2014) report that when an athletic program has a female athletic director, there are typically a higher percentage of female coaches.

Factors Affecting Student-Athlete Academic Success

To retain academic integrity within athletics, the NCAA mandated all participating conferences require all student-athletes to enroll in a minimum of 12 hours per semester. To be eligible to play, student-athletes must maintain a minimum 2.0 GPA to guarantee participation on a collegiate team. If a student-athlete fails to maintain 12 semester credit hours a semester, the athlete is automatically ineligible to play, which in some cases affects athletic scholarships.

Potuto and O'Hanlon (2007) reveal in the NSSE study that approximately 53% student-athletes stated they had not spent as much time on all aspects of their academic work as they would have liked, while 80% of them responded with athletic participation as the reason they maintained their academics. In the study, 68% of the student-athletes said they would have liked to spend more time on campus pursuing additional educational opportunities, but time constraints restricted their availability to participate. Potuto and O'Hanlon (2007) also reported that approximately one-half of the student-athletes surveyed revealed feeling discriminated against by their professors simply because they participated in an athletic program. Jolly (2008) explains that most faculty members are flexible and willing to assist students, but some professors have specific restrictions not allowing students to reschedule exams and turn in late assignments due to rigorous team travel. These encounters may create a negative impact on the student-athlete and affect the relationship between the student and faculty member. Jolly (2008) describes the interaction as an inhibition of the student to initiate dialogue with the professor since the student-athlete may fear the faculty member might label the student as "unintelligent,

unqualified, lazy, incompetent, unworthy, irresponsible, and unable to maintain the academic rigor expected of all students” (p. 16).

Summary

In summary, current literature revealed vast differences continue to exist between traditional students and the student-athlete’s academic experience during college. For the student-athletes, pressure to perform both academically and athletically is an ongoing challenge while balancing the dualities of the roles as student and athlete. Literature also revealed that some academic institutions may have a segment of faculty who perceive athletic programs as an institutionalized business and diminish the integrity of academic programs. This perception may lead to a negative attitude in the faculty member, which creates a resentment and unwillingness to work with the unpredictable schedule of the college athletes. For the first-generation college student, research revealed an astounding number of barriers students must overcome to successfully graduate from college. A first-generation female college athlete encounters additional barriers that may be attributed to a lack of support and availability of equitable resources to participate in an athletic program. Current gaps in the literature reveal that there are limited studies related to the academic success and first-hand experiences of a first-generation student-athlete during their collegiate career. As the growing number of culturally diverse female athletes continue to participate in collegiate sports, decision makers in academia must continue to explore best practices for women in sports to ensure equitable resources are available for student-athletes to achieve academic success and attain graduation.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This study focused on the experiences of six first-generation female athletes as “students” and “athletes” while balancing the demands of academics and athletics. The results from the study identified key systems that facilitated and improved their overall academic success. The study considered challenges impeding their progress while attending college and competing in collegiate sports.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the qualitative study was to explore the perceptions and barriers of academic success from the lens of the first-generation female student-athlete.

Research Questions

To understand the perspective of the student-athlete, two research questions were developed:

- 1) How do first-generation female student-athletes balance the demands of college and athletics?
- 2) What are the barriers encountered during the college experience?

Research Approach and Rationale

Qualitative research is founded on the philosophical premise of social constructivism as a worldview (Pereira, 2016). This study considered the personal experience of the female athlete from a constructivist perspective to understand problems or situations from their world. Roller and Lavrakas (2015) describe social constructivism in qualitative research as “a natural marriage wedded by mutual respect for the complexities of the human experience between researcher’s role and the participant” (p.1). This exchange provides a framework that allows the opportunity for a high level of thinking with creative quality outcomes (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015).

Based on the purpose of this study, the qualitative approach for the research supports the inquiry into the life of the female athlete's experience, academic history, and family support. Through a constructivism framework, the flexibility of the design provided the opportunity for the development of a valuable participant–research relationship by allowing for deeper and more meaningful responses from the participant. The approach provided the researcher the opportunity to review the qualitative data in “an analytical, reflective, and transparent method” (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, pg. 1). According to Yin (2002), in a qualitative design, the methodology allows for the studying of people's lives in a real-world context. This opportunity provided insight into the challenges young women experienced as athletes and as first-generation college students.

The approach for the study was an interpretive design. In this approach, the collection of qualitative data was obtained through in-depth interviews with six female student-athletes. All participants voluntarily agreed to be a part of the study. During the conversations, in-depth descriptive accounts of their experiences emerged, and their responses were divided into thematic categories (Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007). After the data was collected, the responses were transcribed and masked with a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality and protect the identity of the participants.

Research Design

The overall purpose of qualitative research is to “understand how people make sense of their lives and experiences (Merriam, 2009, p. 23). A qualitative research methodology provides the researcher with an opportunity to examine a phenomenon lacking significant research. This study explored a basic interpretive approach to research a marginalized segment of women participating in athletics. The motivation for the research was to explore how first-generation

female student-athletes balance academics and athletics to achieve academic success in college. Creswell (2009) notes that “when employing a qualitative approach, the researcher can further investigate identity issues that speak on behalf of the marginalized population while simultaneously providing the opportunity to report information and contribute to a better society” (p. 19). Results of the study identified common themes shared by participants while mastering the college experience. The experiences were shared from the consciousness of the student-athlete and revealed through their rich descriptions that lead to their academic success. The analysis of the data provided a framework bridging the gap between the student’s own experiences and steps leading to their academic success (Savin-Baden & Van-Niekerk, 2007, p. 468.) For the first-generation female student-athlete, the qualitative design provided the opportunity for the former female athletes to share their voice in a field that is typically male-dominated, and the first-hand experience provided insight on how to better serve future female athletes entering the field of the athletics.

Protection of Human Subjects

All participants in the study signed a consent form with details regarding the purpose of the study and interview protocol. A copy of the consent form was provided for the participants, and original consent forms were secured and locked in the personal home office of the researcher. Participants were provided the option to withdraw from the study at any point. The University of the Incarnate Word Institutional Review Board (IRB) confirmed there was no level of risk for the study as outlined in the IRB guidelines. In the event of a medical emergency, the researcher is a certified American Red Cross CPR instructor.

Participants received a copy of the participant's bill of right outlining the following:

- Throughout the duration of the study, the researcher will treat the participant in a respectful manner.
- Participants may withdraw at any time from the study.
- Each participant received clear and specific descriptions of interviews.
- Participants will receive information on the benefits or risks of the study.
- Researcher will provide a brief resume, research experience, and training of the researcher to the participant to review.
- Participants will be encouraged to asked questions throughout the study if they are not comfortable with the process.
- The researcher will not pressure the participant to stay in the study if the experience is uncomfortable.
- The researcher will protect the participant's rights and privacy under limitations of the law.

To protect the rights of the human subjects, names, location, and identity will not be revealed in the study, and all recordings and field notes will be destroyed 3 years after the study is complete.

Setting of the Study

The study was conducted at a small private university in the Southwestern region of the United States. The institution is a member of the National Intercollegiate Athletic Association participating in the Red River Conference. The athletic program currently hosts 13 sports, six men's teams, and five women's teams. Five of the interviews with the participants were

conducted in a private location in the athletic center. One interview was conducted at a university satellite campus in another city to accommodate the logistics of the participant.

Research Participants

An email was sent to the Athletic Director requesting permission to conduct the study. Once the administrative approval was received from the Athletic Director, an email was sent to the coaches of the women's athletic teams requesting emails and phone contacts of the athletes that graduated within the last five years. Participant selection was determined through a purposeful sample of students-athletes. To meet the criteria for the study, participants must be a first-generation college student, a certified student-athlete through the National Intercollegiate Athletic Association (NAIA), and graduated from an accredited university within the last 5 years.

Description of the Participants

Participants volunteering for the study were determined through purposeful sampling from a selection of student-athletes that graduated from an institution located in Southwest Texas. According to Morse (1991), through the selection of purposeful sampling, the researcher can choose to interview individuals who possess a broad knowledge of the topic and have firsthand experience in the topic studied. Coaches were asked to share a list of former female student-athletes that graduated within the last 5 years. Participants for the study were first recruited by email. Former student-athletes were asked to share the information with other athletes who had graduated within the last five years, prompting the snowball sampling of the participants in the recruitment process.

The women participating in the study represented four of five sports hosted by the university. Teams represented in the study included cross country, softball, basketball, and

soccer. Team cohesion and interpersonal dynamics play a vital role in the success of any team. For a clearer understanding of team dynamic and operation of each sport, coaches recruit no less than 15 members and field up to thirty-five team members to the team. Recruitment varies depending on financial scholarships available for each respective sport. The sports represented in the study consisted of participants that competed in both team and individual sporting contests. As a student-athlete, participants interacted daily with a Head Coach, an Assistant Coach, Athletic Trainer, and in some cases a Graduate Assistant Coach. Student-athletes participating in individual sports typically received one-on-one coaching instruction and training sessions with their coach.

Vogt (1999) describes the snowballing technique as a process of finding research subjects when one subject refers to another subject, and in turn, provides another name for another participant in the research. Snowball sampling allows for the expansion of the number of participants for the study. As the snowballing sampling reached saturation, it was determined the sample met the requirement for the study. The six participants selected for the study graduated from the university and represented the following sports: women's basketball, softball, soccer, and cross-country.

Participation criteria for the study:

- Student-athlete is 18 years of age or older.
- Student-athlete self-identified as a first-generation student.
- Student-athlete graduated from an accredited university within the last 5 years.
- Student-athlete is willing to volunteer to participate in the study.
- Student-athlete was a certified student-athlete in the NAIA.
- Student-athlete is willing to share accounts of her experience as a student-athlete.

- Student-athlete is willing to share both the positive and negative experiences of her college experience as a student and an athlete.

Research Instruments

Face to face individual interviews were guided by a set of 12 semi-structured questions with the option for additional follow-up questions. During the interviews, the conversations were recorded with a digital device and saved on a password-protected computer. A notebook was also used to take notes during the interview when necessary, and the researcher kept a reflexive journal to support triangulation of the study.

Data Collection Procedure

To participate in the study, participants must have self-identified as a first-generation college student, played collegiate sports, been certified to play in the NAIA, and graduated from college within the last five years. Participants volunteering for the study were determined through the selection of a purposeful sampling of students-athletes. Initially, eight former student-athletes were contacted and agreed to participate in the study. After the final consult and follow-up, only six committed to participate in the study.

Data collection was conducted through face-to-face semi-structured interviews followed by one thirty-minute follow-up session to check for accuracy of the field notes. Member checking was supported by a review of transcriptions by the participants. Trustworthiness “was achieved by thoughtful triangulation of the interviews, the transcription of the interviews and documentation of field notes were supported through the presentation of the rich thick descriptions of the participant's experiences” (Jutasen, 2007).

Snowballing sampling was used to recruit participants for over 8 weeks. Participants were contacted by phone and email. Interviews were scheduled at various times to accommodate

the participant. The average duration of the interviews ranged from 90 to 105 minutes in length. During the interviews, participants were asked to share their experiences as a first-generation student-athlete balancing athletics and college life.

To understand the perspective of the participants, two central questions guided the data collection process:

1. How do first-generation female student-athletes balance the demands of college and athletics?
2. What are the barriers encountered during the college experience?

The following open-ended questions guided the interview process:

1. What were your goals in attending college?
2. Tell me about your college selection process.
3. Tell me about the education of your parents/guardians.
4. What kind of family support do you have?
5. Describe your experience as a first-year student-athlete.
 - a. Did you have any special challenges?
 - b. Was there anyone or anything that provided support?
6. Tell me about your experience in athletics?
 - a. How has your experience as a student and athlete affected your progress in school?
7. As you look back on your college experience, what were some milestones as a student-athlete?
8. As you look back on your college experience, what were some academic milestones you have encountered?

9. Can you think of a time in your college experience when there was a conflict between athletics and academics? What exactly happened?
10. Tell me about your experience as a female student and athlete.
11. What would you share with other female athletes about the college experience?
12. What are some ways in which being a first-generation female student athlete has influenced your academic experience? Can you share some examples?

The goal of the study was to gather first-hand accounts from the student-athlete in both academics and athletics. During the interviews, the women openly shared events and people who were influential in their college experience and facilitated their journey to graduation. 5 participants committed to being interviewed on the main campus in the private location in the athletic center. One participant lived 200 miles from the interview site. This participant relocated to another city and was willing to participate in the study. To complete the research, travel to the participant's location was necessary to accommodate the schedule of the participant. During the interviews, the participants were informed the project was voluntary and they had the option to withdraw from the interview at any time. The face-to-face semi-structured meetings included a digital recording upon the consent of the participant. After the first meeting, the researcher transcribed the participant's responses in a truthful, reflective representation from the lens of the student-athlete. A second meeting was scheduled with the participant to ensure the participant's responses were represented in a true and accurate account from the perspective of the student-athlete. Once all data was collected, the researcher coded the responses into basic codes, categories, and thematic sequences for investigation.

Merriam and Tisdale (2016) state that in qualitative research, "the study is based on the belief that knowledge is constructed by people in an ongoing fashion as they engage in and make

meaning of an activity, experience, or phenomenon” (p. 23). Through an inductive process, significant themes and concepts emerged from the participant's responses (Jutasen, 2007). In qualitative analysis, a code is a consistent pattern emerging from a participant's response and takes the form of a word or phrases (Saldana, 2016). Through an open coding process, the first level of coding began with a breakdown of data into concepts or subheadings. In the development phase of the coding construct, conceptual variables began to emerge related to the purpose of the study (Adu, 2013). The open coding process allowed for the organization of the data into categories exhibiting similar characteristics, which then developed into another set of categories, and finally emerged into dominate themes related to the study (Saldana, 2016).

Data analysis process

Careful attention to the transcription of the data was taken to accurately reflect the responses of the participants and reduce the data. Transcribing interviews is labor-intensive and requires a significant amount of time to ensure interviews accurately represent the responses of the participants. During the coding process, it is significant to the integrity of the study to remain flexible and open to other coding approaches as rich descriptions emerge. Before beginning the coding process, it was important to remain aware of any personal beliefs or bias influencing the coding process (Adu, 2013).

For this study, all steps in the coding and categorizing process were manually coded using an excel spreadsheet. Once the transcriptions were completed, participants were assigned a pseudonym with a designation of P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, or P6. A second meeting was scheduled with the participants to review responses to ensure accuracy. In the next step in the analysis, the transcriptions were reviewed for evidence of repeated short phrases or words and formatted in an excel spreadsheet. The first cycle of transcripts was coded into “words or short phrases to

symbolically assign a summative, salient, essence-capturing language” from the responses of the participants (Saldana, 2016, p. 4). Careful attention was made not to lose the data, and capture significant ideas and issues related to understanding the phenomena being studied. In the first cycle of responses, basic codes were categorized with the interview questions. A phrase or word from the participant’s responses was included in the first basic coding process. Table 1 represents the model used to record the data analysis.

Table 1

Post-Interview Code Categorization Analysis Table

Participant	What were your goals for attending college?	Basic Code 1
P01		
P02		
P03		

202 basic codes emerged from the responses. Data analysis is a significant part of the research design and selecting the appropriate collection method is essential for the credibility of the study (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Schreier (2012) describes the analysis process as a systematic sequence of steps that allows the researcher to check the coding process for consistency. In the second cycle of coding, clusters were summarized and condensed to 187 codes. This phase allowed for the detection of patterns in the “theory building and other analytic processes” (Saldana, 2016, p. 4).

Grbich (2007) describes coding as a process of applying and reapplying data in groups and relinking the data to provide meaning and explanation. This process allowed for the opportunity for categories with the same characteristics to emerge. Abbott (2004) describes recategorizing like “decorating a room, you try it, step back, move few things, step back again, try a serious reorganization, and so on” (p. 215). After coding and recoding the cluster of data,

12 recurring clusters were categorized into value codes. Saldana (2016) suggests using value coding to explore identity and intrapersonal and interpersonal experiences of the participants. The application of value codes in qualitative data was used to represent the participant perspective and worldview. In this phase of the coding cycle, as represented by Table 2, data were categorized in a value code approach and assigned an attitude, value, or belief.

Table 2

Values Coding Table

(A) (B) (C)	Basic Code 2	Participant	Notes
Attitude		P01	
Value		P04	
Belief		P06	

Saldana (2016) defines the values, beliefs, and attitudes according to the following definitions:

Values (V): the importance we attribute to ourselves, another person, thing, or idea: principal, moral codes and situational norms people live by (p.131).

Beliefs (B): A system that includes our values and attitudes, plus our personal knowledge, experiences, opinions, prejudices, morals and interpretive perceptions in the social world. Beliefs are embedded in the values we attach to them (p.131).

Attitudes (A): the way we think and feel about ourselves, another person, thing, or idea: enduring system of evaluative, affective reactions based on concepts of beliefs which have been learned (p.131).

“Coding is a transitional process between data collection and more extensive data analysis” (Saldana, 2016, p.5). Themes related to values emerged from the data and were categorized according to the value coding of derived themes relevant to the study. Saldana (2016) suggests when coding units according to values, attitudes, and beliefs “work under the premise of all three constructs become a part of an interconnected system” (p. 132). Through the reflective analysis of the codes, the development of the themes emerged from the participant’s

responses. Sipe and Ghiso (2004) reveal that “all coding is a judgment call since researchers bring their subjectivity, personalities, predispositions, and quirks to the process” (p.482-483). Through the comparison of categories, patterns, and the precise words from the participants, overarching themes for the study emerged and were developed (Pereira, 201).

Trustworthiness and Credibility

In a qualitative study, the researcher must maintain trustworthiness and credibility. To maintain credibility, the researcher must pay careful attention to establish the research method and implementation is approached in an organized manner to protect the implementation and integrity of a study. Schram (2016) recommends the following four basic guidelines to build a framework to support the integrity of the study: purposeful, circumstantial, intuitive, and empathetic methods for the fieldwork process.

1. Through purposeful interaction, the researcher remains attentive to their personal values and bias that could potentially affect the conclusions of the study.
2. Circumstantial approaches require the researcher to consider that in some cases, the expectation of the findings cannot be absolute and unchanging; therefore, outcomes are contingent on circumstantial findings.
3. An intuitive lens of the researcher provides sensitivity to changing interpretations that might be interesting or useful to readers of the study.
4. An empathetic sense of understanding allows the researcher to be better aware of what is useful and important to study the participants.

Researcher Bias

A researcher may bring bias in a qualitative study. Merriam and Tisdale (2016) describe reflexivity as critical self-reflection by the researcher that may affect the investigation. A

reflexive journal was maintained throughout the study to serve as a first-hand account of personal prejudices and notes of any influence over the results of interviews. As the researcher and instrument for the study, I was aware of any bias that I may bring to the study in my role as an Administrator in the athletic program. To ensure the credibility of the study, participant selection was done through a purposeful sampling method.

Additionally, the reflection document served as a method to support the triangulation of the study. As a researcher for the study, I assumed the responsibility of establishing earned trust with the participants while remaining sensitive to the personal experiences of fieldwork in the qualitative design. To uphold the rigor of the study, participant engagement was conducted in an authentic and accurate disciplined process. Respect for and privacy of each participant was paramount to the study, and the participants had the option to voluntarily withdraw at any time throughout the research.

Triangulation

Triangulation was used to safeguard the credibility of the study through member checking and reflexive journaling. In the interpretive design, the process of checking data and analysis from multiple perspectives ensured the consistency and authenticity of the research. Member checking also supported the internal validity of the data. This was accomplished after the initial and follow up interviews with participants. This process eliminated the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning and perspective of data by supporting the validation process for the triangulation of the study (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). Analysis of the data was reviewed and rechecked by experts in the field of research analysis to ensure the trustworthiness and credibility of the study.

Conclusion

Scholars agree that the position of the researcher during a study is to uphold the trustworthiness, ethical, and overall integrity of the methodology. To support the rigor of the study, participant responses were collected in an authentic and accurate disciplined process. Careful attention was made to establish trust with the participants while remaining sensitive to the personal experiences of fieldwork in the qualitative design. Additional measures were taken to respect the privacy of each participant by allowing the option to withdraw from the study any time throughout the research. Finally, to uphold the credibility of the methodology, the triangulation of the study was maintained through regular member checking and reflexive journaling.

Chapter Four: Research, Findings, and Analysis

To raise awareness of the true experiences from the lens of a first-generation female student-athlete, I chose a qualitative design to direct the study. The purpose of the qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of academic success and barriers from the lens of the first-generation female student-athlete. Altogether, six participants met the requirement to participate in the basic interpretive design. Face-to-face meetings were scheduled as a preliminary interview, followed by a scheduled review of transcriptions by the participants. The data analysis began once the transcriptions were approved by the participant in the study.

Researcher's Field Experience

To increase the number of participants for the study, email requests were regularly sent to former female student-athletes to partake in the study. To facilitate the ease of scheduling for the participants, I made myself available at their convenience. Once meetings were confirmed, a meeting was scheduled. During the meeting, trust was established with each participant. The face-to-face interaction provided the opportunity to delve into meaningful conversations throughout the interview. Responses were candid and truthful. When noteworthy responses emerged, notations were jotted in a journal. The conversations were insightful, and as a researcher, I discovered the responses from the women to be authentic, relatable, emotional, and focused. In some conversations, I felt moved by their honesty and sincerity. The women sharing their experience were open about their struggles and successes, while expressing their sincere gratitude to be among a group of trailblazing women for a new athletic program.

Findings

During the transcriptions of the interviews, 202 basic codes emerged. In the second cycle of the coding process, responses were condensed to one hundred and eighty-seven basic codes. Codes were reviewed and clustered into categories of value codes and assigned a value, attitude, and belief. After careful analysis of the Values Codes, the codes were analyzed for dominant categories emerging from the relationships linked to the research questions directing the study.

In many of the conversations, the women shared their gratitude to have the opportunity to participate in an athletic program and expressed an appreciation to be part of a young athletic program established in 2007. In some conversations, the women also shared an appreciation to be trailblazers for a new athletic program. Others expressed a deep gratitude for the lessons learned as a college athlete while noting the experience as the highlight their college career.

Participants were asked to share their goals for attending college to obtain a deeper understanding of the educational background and academic aptitude. Participants shared very different reasons for attending college. One participant shared she never planned to attend college since her parents were from Mexico and she did not understand the college process. Two participants had a direct plan to graduate in four years and the desire to attend graduate studies, while two participants shared the main reason to attend college was to have the opportunity to play sports in college.

All participants met the first-generation requirement to participate in the study. Table 3 provides the educational background of their parents.

Table 3

Educational Background of Participant's Parents

Participant	Mother	Father
P01	High school diploma	High school diploma & some college
P02	Did not finish high school	Did not finish high school
P03	High school diploma	High school diploma
P04	High school diploma & 2 years college	High school diploma & some college
P05	High school diploma	Unknown
P06	High school diploma & some college	High school diploma

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do first-generation female student-athletes balance the demands of college and athletics?
2. What are the barriers encountered during the college experience?

Four dominant themes emerged and were selected as the primary themes from the analysis. The four themes contain subcategories that link the overarching themes from the data analysis:

- Athletic Experience is Multifaceted
- Family Support is Significant to Success
- Academic Expectations are Overwhelming
- Navigating the College Experience

Descriptions supporting each theme and subcategories are included in the following excerpts from the interviews with participants in the sections below. Saldana's (2016) Value Codes are also indicated using one of three alpha abbreviations representing Values (V), Beliefs (B), and Attitudes (A).

Athletic Experience is Multifaceted

Participants expressed an appreciation for the opportunity to participate in the athletic program and most participants agreed it enhanced their college experience. The experience did

not arrive without challenges. For the first-generation female-athlete, the multifaceted athletic experience is complex. The participants were challenged to learn to adjust to a new environment in both the athletic and academic domain. Participants expressed concern balancing the multiple challenges related to gender equity, undervaluing the role of women in sports, and the influence of coaches.

One participant describes her experience:

P01: (B) It was so much fun, it opened a whole world for me. The first time I left the state was for a meet, my coach pulled over and let me take picture a picture on the Texas and Oklahoma Border.

Participant P01 also shares an unfortunate experience when traveling with her team and describes an incident she perceived as discrimination directed towards the team when traveling outside of Texas. Participant P01 shares:

P01: (B) I think the most uncomfortable thing I felt was up north and everybody was staring at us because half the team is Hispanic. That's when I felt really uncomfortable and we just left the place. We were going as a team to eat and I don't remember what state or where were eating. Everybody was staring at us. I know this has also happened several places in Texas and when we went to Kansas. We are the only Hispanic team.

Balancing the demands of athletics in a new environment requires adjustment and acclimation to the different personalities and new surroundings. Several participants describe their first year in athletics as “challenging” while adjusting to a new team, coach, and environment. Participant P03 shares:

P03(B): It was different. A big change from high school to college but college was a more intense game. It was much faster than high school. It was a good experience; I would do it all over again.

P06(B): The challenges were getting used to a whole new team and coach. Um, our coach was not easy to play for and he is very strict, which is what I am used to. He just took to a whole other level.

Several participants agreed it was challenging to play sports while in school, and there was greater pressure to maintain academics to remain eligible to play. Participant P04 shares:

P04:(B) College is hard and playing college ball is hard.

Participant P03 describes pressures to play athletics. P03 shares:

P03:(B) I know student-athletes need to pass to play. Athletics have to try harder and if they want to play it places more pressure in school.

Gender equity. Gender inequality has a longstanding tradition in sports. The athletic realm has been historically dominated by men and remains a debated subject concerning equitable resources for women in athletes. The representation of female role models in intercollegiate programs is an important role in decision making and as role model of leadership for women in sports. Two participants shared they felt more comfortable with a female on the coaching staff as the Head or Assistant Coach. During the interviews, participants shared their perception of gender inequity in the athletic program. Some participants expressed uncertainty of how the male athletes would treat the female athletes. Other participants felt the women's team were discriminated against since the men's team received more attention than the women. Participants felt coaches treated athletes the same, but the gender of the coach in a position of authority did make some of the participants nervous. All six participants unanimously agreed there are limited opportunities for women to participate in sports professionally after college. This is evident with the national attention surrounding the controversy of the lack of female Head Coaches in NCAA Division 1 programs. Participant P01 expressed her concerns:

P01: (A) It's always kind of scary for a girl or female with a male Coach because you hear stuff all of the time. I never felt uncomfortable around my Coach. Sometimes there are bunch of guys. All the guys teams, they are all around. We are sometimes dressed half naked for our sport and I felt the need to cover up because of the way I was raised, like being modest and protect yourself. Some of these stories of women getting hurt are scary and we need to be weary of that. I feel like I take that with me even though I know it's a safe environment.

Participant P02 shares her experience with team gender inequities between the men and women's team while traveling together for an athletic contest. Participant P02 states:

P02: (B) The Head Coach coached both the men and women's team. The games were back to back and since he coached both teams, he was not able to prepare the men enough for their game since he was coaching the women. The men played the worst game I have ever seen them play. I am pretty sure they were scoring on themselves, and they lost five to one. It was crazy. Our Head Coach was upset, and we traveled together. We were blamed because they lost... we were like, whoa, whoa, whoa....., we actually won our game. How are you going to blame us, for ya'all? That's all you. We were a winning team. We were just like, what is right is right and how can you blame someone else? Eventually the word got around that we were being blamed and eventually the females were assigned one Coach. Ummm, I think his frustration was taken out on us and I think it could be read on our expressions. Ok, alright, whatever, they were all mad they lost, we won, and we get it. They had a bad record overall."

Participants expressed a greater appreciation to have female coaches on the team to provide a balance of the two genders when communicating with the team. Participant P04 shares:

P04: (A) I had to overcome talking to my Coach. When I was younger my dad was my coach. Because whenever he would yell at me or I would get yelled at by him all of the time. He Coached me for two sports. I would get the double life all of the time. He yelled at me all of the time. When he yelled at me, I would just break down and cry. It was usually in the car on the way home. I would look out the window and just ignore it, just take it in. I guess that's where it started. The female assistant coach, I wasn't nervous to talk to her, (long pause), the fact that she was female that made me more comfortable. So, I think at one point, my coach told my dad that he really liked the type of player I was and he wished he had more players like me because I would just accept my role as how I was on the team, rather than fight against it."

Undervalued role of women in sports. Female representation in head coaching positions continues to remain low compared to male head coaches. In a 2014 report on Women in Collegiate Sports, it was reported that 4 out of 10 coaches for women's teams were females, while 97 out of 100 coaches for men's teams are coached by males (Acosta & Carpenter, 2014, p.10). Participants describe women's sports as a more structured strategy of play than men's sports. The former athletes expressed disappointment that women's teams did not receive the same support as men, since the women's teams competed at a high level of competition and had multiple successful seasons. The women openly shared additional challenges within the team dynamic and some of the participants describe the interaction as unnecessary conflict amongst

the women on the team. Two participants cautioned there is drama on the team and emphasized the need to be prepared to handle the conflict. Participant P01 states:

P01: (B) Compared to team sports, individual sports can be nasty during practice. Women are usually the ones. And when women get nasty, that's when the drama is going on. Interesting, we have had so many arguments within our team. It happens with teammates. It has not happened with me, but I've seen it out there and my friends around the team. Women will push you during competition and will even trip you while you are running. It gets pretty nasty.

One participant was very proud to describe women in sports sharing her belief that a college female athlete is part of an elite group of women. According to Participant P02:

P02: (B) If I can describe a female athlete with one word, I'd say ELITE. To be a guy and play sports, that's the norm. People didn't want girls kicking balls around. Now, this is Elite. It's still rare just to say you played sports. Um, that's the cream of the crop. It's hard to do while you are studying. I feel like you are defying the odds when you are female. Ok, you are female athlete, you're a student-athlete, and you finished in four years? It's like every time you finish a level it's the wow effect. I don't think it is easy, but I think it's doable. If people just kinda work hard, stick to their mind, they can be whatever they want to be. I just do not see limits. I wish everybody can see it like that.

All female participants agreed that, once their athletic eligibility has been completed, there are a very few opportunities to continue professionally in their sport. Participant P03 states:

P03: (A) In my sport, there is hardly a chance to go pro. Not that this is a bad school, it's a small school. It's tough and the only look at the big schools. Oh, there is only like five Pro-teams in my sport. I'm just going to compare like softball and baseball. There are pro baseball players that have 200 million-dollar contracts. That is a subject that makes me very mad. That makes me sick how much money they make. Here I felt we got support, but I felt they would choose baseball over us."

The women had strong opinions of the gender inequity in the athletic program and describe incidents of lack of support at home games. Participant P03 shares:

P03: (B) I just think, like, if I had to say a sport is favored, it's the men's team. It's because when we are playing games, the men's team would also be playing. It's the little things like live streaming. They always livestream the men's games but never both at home. And the announcer would always leave to go to the men's sports. Things like that. Talking about that, uh, I know the college world series is going on and girls don't get enough credit in sports at all. For example, you can purchase tickets to a woman's

basketball game and pay \$20.00 dollars for a ticket for third row seats, for men's basketball, you will pay thousands.

Participant P05 expresses her disappointment:

P05: (B) We can be the number one team and we will not have as many fans as the males do when its game time. Even as far as going out and putting posters and letting people know we have a really big game. I guess it's not as enjoyable as males. With women, we play a more structured game. If there is a play to run, we run the play. Males are much more athletic, and, uh, it's a much faster pace of game and can do more on the fly.

Influence of coach. According to Kitley (2006), females do not become coaches due to the lack of female mentors and role models. Reade, Rodgers, and Norman (2009) explain the imbalance as a result of women being subjected to marginalization, low level pay, and few opportunities to demonstrate coaching ability. Responses from the participants have mixed views on whether the gender of the Coach influences their success on and off the field. Several participants shared relationship building was easier with female coaches. Participants also stressed the importance of having faith in their Coach to push them to their limits and to make them a better athlete and student. Participants shared their gratitude to the Coach and staff for keeping them on task with their classes. The women also shared an appreciation for their coaches for their support and helping them reach graduation. Participant P01 shares her appreciation for her coach:

P01: (V) I have so much respect for my coach, so I am going to keep talking about him. I feel like he created an environment where it didn't matter who you are or where you are from or what gender you are or anything like that. You were seen as equal and you could do the same thing as other people.

P01: (V) Have faith in your Coach, his work outs, and listen to everything he tells you to do. There is a reason he tells us to do certain things and there is a reason behind the workout.

Participant P05 acknowledges her coach was tough, but shares her appreciation for his support to help her keep up with her classwork

P05: (V) Coach was on top of things and making sure we were letting our professors know when we would be away from games. My coach was tough, but to this day I am grateful for his support.

Participant P06 experienced a strong-willed coach as a student-athlete and shared an appreciation for the leadership style of her female coach.

P06: (V) Sometimes our Coach was hot-headed, and you could not really talk to him. You could talk to the assistants if you had an issue or question during the game. I had another Coach who was female, and she was my favorite. She was very understanding. The way she got mad at you is different from how other Coaches would address you. She would address the whole team if somebody was doing one specific thing wrong. She would not just call you out. She played before, has coached for a long time and understands the players more.

Innately competitive athlete. Participants value the structure and discipline that athletics provided as a student-athlete and individual. Participants were driven in their individual sport and shared multiple stories of perseverance. Participants shared their personal challenges to maintain an active status on the team and agreed on the importance of self-discipline. Participants agree that to be successful in athletics, you must be self-sufficient and focused to compete in sports. Participants value hard work and believe to earn your place on the team, you must push your limits and work hard to win. As competitors, the women shared their athletic achievement individually and as a team.

Participant P02 values the lessons soccer provided for her tenacity to work hard:

P02: (V) I've had always been self-sufficient since I was little, since I did not have both my parents. I don't have a relationship with my mom at all. You have to do it all for yourself or who's going to do it for you? I am grateful for my brother, he raised me for a lot of years."

P02: (V) If it weren't for soccer, I really do not think I would have gone to college. It was because of soccer I found an opportunity. I think it was the best experience I could ask for. Do I think it was hard? YES, but I don't think anything is easy. I also know it teaches you a lot of stuff, things in life.

Participant P04 did not allow her fear of failure to hinder her growth in athletics:

P04: (V) Fear of failure is big for me and making it in athletics or not playing was very stressful for me. Freshman year, I was not a starter and I worked hard to be a starter and played and started the last three years in college.

Participant P05 shares how she trained for a new coach and hard work:

P05: (V) I was always a starter and when we got a new coach, I had to work harder to earn my spot; like working harder afterhours to be the best. I had to put in the work and prove to the coach I was worth the time.

P05: (V) What you bring to the practice, you bring to the game, you have to leave it all out there in the court and let your work ethic speak for itself.

Participant P06 holds the record for most three-pointers but remained focused on the game:

P06: (V) Breaking the record for the most three-pointers in a game. It was difficult because I tied it several other times during the game. I didn't realize I needed one more in the previous games to break the record. I was really more worried about winning the game at the time."

Family Support is Significant to Success

Participants expressed the importance of family support in both athletics and college academics, since both required dedication, commitment, and hard work. Participants shared the importance of family connection and support during the college experience as a student-athlete. It was important to the participants to graduate from college and make their parents and family proud. Participants also expressed their appreciation of support when family attended their games and the support, they provided throughout their college career. Not all the participants received the direct support most of the women experienced during their college time. Topics emerging from the participants response included the significance of family support and lack of family support during the college experience.

Participant P01 shared her appreciation for her grandfather and father encouraging her to go to school:

P01: (V) When I first came to visit the school, my grandpa came with me. I realized they had the sport I was in. I sent the coach a video of me at a track meet. Me and my dad

were really excited because he was recording me, and I was running at that meet and you can hear him in the background saying “Go Mija” and his voice is cracking.

Participant P03 shares her appreciation for the sacrifices of her family to provide a better life:

P03: (V) My parents support me with everything I do. Ever since I was little, they did everything for me in sports and traveling ball. College, like when picking a college, wherever you are going, like, you will make the right choice. They were always there if I need them.

P03: (V) When I was little my mom tried to finish school, but it was hard because she worked full time. My dad worked full time and my mother worried about us, so she stopped going to school to be responsible and take care of us.

P03: (V) I live here that is why I chose this school, so my family can watch my game. I can play in front of them.”

Lack of family support. Two participants shared that the lack of family support limited their exposure to prepare for college. In some cases, the lack of support resulted in no plans to attend college or lack of understanding of the type of degree to seek for a career. Participants also shared loss of parental guidance, which resulted in lack of direction.

Participant P02 openly shares her struggles in college with parental guidance:

P02: (A) I wish someone would have told me they were offering a clinic on Education. We had a career center, but they did not come to you. If you do not know the questions to ask, how do you know? Something to give to people who are not having those conversations at home.

P02: (A) Actually, I really did not have the support. In my family, the support really wasn't there. I did gain support from my friends and the community but not so much at home.

P02: (A) I felt like my first year I did not have people to back me up. They need more of a support system. You don't know what they are going through. By then, I had a relationship with my dad, but I worked hard and her never understood what I had to do to keep up with academics and athletics.

Participant P02 shares the difficulty of the college experience:

P02: (A): Father did not know the struggles. They did not know that I wake up at 5:00 am for practice, attended all my courses, luncheons, five classes in a row, then go home and shower and then start over. Then I have two-a-days and I'm traveling on the road. You can't understand unless you've been there. Sometimes it tough.

Participant P05 lost her mother at a very young age and did not know if she would attend college:

P05: (A) Um, I came from out of state. I did not know I could attend college and that would be an option. Um, my mom passed away my junior year in high school and my father, I don't know, I really don't know.

Academic Expectations Were Overwhelming

For a student-athlete to participate in collegiate sports, the student must maintain academic eligibility and be certified to play. Athletes juggle multiple demands in both academics and athletics. Participants shared that academics was overwhelming to adjust to upon arriving to college. The pressure to be academically prepared while competing in the season was reported to be stressful by the participants. Some of the participants shared that school had always been a struggle. Other concerns ranged from lack of academic preparedness, to trouble with test taking. Topics emerging from the participants response also include overcoming faculty perceptions of student-athletes.

P01 shares the support she received:

P01: (B) It was really McNair that helped me flesh out my goals to see what I wanted to do. Once I was in McNair it really helped me. Once my professors found out I was a McNair they would talk to me about it and I got to know them better.

Participant P03 shares her academic success story her last semester in school:

P03: (V) My senior year I was trying to make it the best one. I thought it was going to be hard because I was taking 21 hours. It was hard because there were nights I hardly slept. I wanted to make all A's to make my parents proud because my mom has always been about good grades and it just made me feel good.

Participant P04 is a high achiever and shares her struggle with class:

P04: (B) That was probably the hardest year as a student-athlete. Um, mostly time management. I wanted to do a work-study job, but being a student-athlete, plus schoolwork, plus having to do study hall hours, I really couldn't fit time into all of that. My first year, I did struggle that year, and probably my sophomore year is probably the only time I got a "C" in class.

Participant P05 shares her appreciation for the small classes and access to her professors:

P05: (V) College, the main concern for me was the education part for me. Um, I really enjoyed being able to reach out to your professor and getting a quick response or to be able to go to your professor after class to get some answers to what needed to be done. Um, I'm not, obviously, I'm okay in class, because I graduated. It has always been a struggle for me, I am not the best at math, math is definitely is a struggle. Um, I enjoyed writing, which is weird, but I really did good in English class. My main worry was academics. I wasn't worried about if I was going to make the team, just schooling, being on the road, and writing 10-page papers. That worried me.

Participant P06 learned the time commitment of the class work in school:

P06: (V) My first semester, I thought it was pretty easy to get adjusted to. Um, I like the scheduling more than high school, so that was something I was excited about. I don't think it took too much to get adjusted to, it was the just the classes required a lot of work.

Faculty perception of student-athletes. Participants expressed challenges understanding professors and their expectations. Most participants had difficulty maintaining their academics, team travel, and lack of support from faculty. The lack of knowledge of athletics by some faculty resulted in some student-athletes feeling they were penalized for time away from class. Participants agreed it is their responsibility to communicate with professors but express a desire for professors to remain open to understanding the expectations of the athletic program on student-athletes.

Participant P02 shares the stress the professors place on the student-athlete:

P02: (B) The professors did not pay attention nor give us an excuse. We had to sacrifice, and it was difficult to get some of the professors to work with you. Some professors supported you, but some weren't as lenient. The ones stricter would add to your stress. Instead of helping us out, they would penalize us for being gone so long. They wouldn't let us takes tests when we came back.

Participant P03 emphasizes the importance of completing requirements for classes:

P03: (B) If you get a scholarship for your sport, you are here for an education. You need to take it seriously, uh because some of the professors do not care if you come to class or not. They don't care if they fail you. They might talk to you and give a warning, but they really think don't care.

Participant P05 explains professors lack of understanding:

P05: (B) I think more so, when I played. I didn't really (pause) get the feeling that the teacher, uh, professors were understanding of my schedule with sports and class schedule.

Participant P05 shares that professors lack awareness of the life of a student-athlete:

P05: (B) It's really just understanding what professors wanted. I think more so, when I played. I didn't really (pause) get the feeling that the teacher, uh, professors were understood my challenging schedule with basketball and class. Yeah, your first year, you are staying overnight, you have to do homework on the road, write papers on the road, so it was definitely a challenge.

Participant P06 believes the teachers do not care if you're an athlete:

P06: (B) Sometimes teachers, they just don't care. You know, if you're an athlete or not. They are going to treat you like everybody else. So sometimes you may be late for a quiz because of travel. They won't count it, and that is totally fine. But I just wish sometimes they knew how much we traveled or how much time travel and sport takes. And sometimes you may need an extension. They may or may not give it to you. It may be a conflict a student-athlete faces.

Navigating the College Experience

The college experience presented different challenges for the participants. Participants shared adjustment to dorm life and dealing with roommates to be overwhelming. Participants also realized the need to learn new study habits since high school was not as demanding as college.

Participant P01 shares her stress with the new environment:

P01: (B) It was hard. Trying to balance everything. I am from a really small-town. It was overwhelming because I think I did not know anyone around me. Sometimes I felt like I wasn't good enough and I would stress out.

P03: (B) It was different. I know that because high school, you can get by without studying but college is totally different. The professors don't take any of that and you have to study to pass.

P05: (B) My first year it was tough moving to the south. My coach was definitely hard, he was different. He pushed me to my limits, and he could get the best out of me. He knew what I was capable of and made me a better player.

Balance and self-awareness. Participants shared their experience in the athletic program provided the opportunity for growth and self-awareness at many levels. Balancing the two roles of student and athlete, helped them learn ways to manage their stress and remain focused throughout college. Participants recognized that high school was easier than college and the need for more discipline in their study habits. Overall, participants agreed the experience helped them gain self-confidence as a female athlete. For some, the self confidence in college helped them overcome the fear of speaking to individuals in position of authority and empowered them to become more assertive.

Participant P04 struggled speaking to authority and learned how to redirect her stress:

P04: (B) Overcome? Oh, yes, (long pause) talking to my coach. I was never good at talking to higher authority. I always get nervous when I talked to him and others in authority. It was overcoming talking to my coach (long pause), and I was very shy.

P04: (B) I was usually stressed my freshman year. I would go to the piano room in our hall. My freshman year, my whole wall was covered with drawings that I did. That's how I learned to cut my stress down.

Participant P06 shares her adjustment to her new coach and determination:

P06: (B) Learning to adjust to a new coach. He was a hothead. But I would do it all over again.

P06: (A) No, I learned to figure it out on my own. If you need to get something done, you will get it done. You just have to do it, even if you don't want to. Even if it's hard.

First-generation identity. Understanding identity is a lifelong process relating to family, friends, ethnicity, and sexual orientation (Alessandria & Nelson, 2005). The term first-generation college student is used to describe a student's identity related to college awareness, since their parents did not complete a four-year college degree. When participants were asked to share the education of their parents, several were unaware of the term first-generation. All participants in the study shared their lack of understanding of the term first-generation and one participant did not realize she was a first-generation college student until it was announced at

graduation. Another learned of her first-generation status when she was invited to participate in the McNair program. The remaining four participants openly shared they were unclear of the term until they were in college and asked to participate in the study. The following excerpts support insight into the participants understanding of a first-generation college student.

Participant P01 shares her understanding of first-generation:

P01: (V) It meant more to me when I came to school here. It made me want to try harder. I never thought about it or heard the word until I got to here. I started hearing the word 'First Gen' being thrown around. I didn't know. I was like, what is that? So, like in ways, I see it as a disadvantage. Just because, I knew nothing about financial aid or loans. Now I'm in so much debt. I don't know how it happened, but it's going to be worth it. So, I guess it was just navigating through it all was hard.

Participant P01 shares the pressures that drive her as a competitor:

P01: (V) I feel like there is more pressure to compete and do better as a first-generation student-athlete. I feel like when we leave Texas people are staring at you and already judging you. I know I can pass as white, but the way I see myself is, I'm brown on the inside and out.

Participant P02 proudly identifies with first-generation:

P02: To be a first-generation student, it's more of an elite group. Wow, the fact of being a female and an athlete. You are the first-generation to do it. Like to be the first person walking on the moon. You're the first to walk on the moon! To me, it's an elite class of person. Overall, I am happy to say I'm Hispanic, and everything I went through to learn to do and not to do. Now I am prepared for whatever happens.

Participant P04 shared her gratitude for her parents support by sharing her graduation:

P04: (V) As a first-generation student, I always wanted to finish for my parents. My dad always told me he never went back to school and my mom always told me she wished she finished. So, when I graduated, it was on Mother's Day. So, I told my mom I was going to wrap my diploma and give it to her. My mom told me, honestly, you don't have to give me anything at all. Getting your bachelors is the best thing you can ever do for me. My parents influenced me to finish school.

Participant P05 was not aware until graduation:

P05(V): It did not click until graduation. I thought, wow, that's me. It feels good to know I made that accomplishment knowing what I have been through. It's very big, and my mom would have been proud.

Participant P06 is looking forward to setting a path for the children:

P06: I had never taken into consideration that I was a first-generation. That is why I choose this school, and like why I choose to play here. I was just thinking I'm doing what I like to do. Now, it's cool thinking about it. Hopefully, I'm setting a path.

Recommendations for future female athletes. Participants emphasized the importance of taking responsibility during the college experience and to utilize the resources available on campus to maintain good grades. One participant suggested future athletes remain open to the advice of coaches and other female athletes, and another participant recommended training harder to be better prepared as an athlete and to learn to trust their teammates for support. All participants agreed it was important to look for opportunities for support in athletics and academics to be successful in college.

Participant P02 shares the following advice:

P02: (B) stay on task, be prepared, and have your ducks in a row, and you will be successful in college.

P02: (B) Everything you learn here you have to be responsible for and you need to be there when you are supposed to be, and be ready to go”

Participant P03 shared the importance of academics and grades:

P03: (V) Pay attention to your attendance and grades because that is most important thing is your education. Especially for female athletes, after college, this is pretty much all there is for all of us.

Participant P04 shares the same view as Participant P03 regarding grades:

P04: (B) Learn how to manage your time in school and athletics well. Just push yourself to be the best and you will be successful. Grades do matter when you get into the real world especially like with interviews for the FBI. Remember just because you're a female does not mean you cannot succeed. Things have changed for females and we have higher roles. Like maybe in the next few years we will have a female President. Things have changed from then and now. So, of course we should hold ourselves to a higher standard than some do.

Participant P05 recommend travel away for college:

P05: (V) Honestly, everybody should experience college. Especially, if you can get out of state and get out of where you are from. You will see a different culture.

Participant P06 cautions to be sure you are willing to put in the time and commitment to play sports and attend college:

P06: (B) If you are thinking of playing, just do it. You will meet a lot of different people and they will be lifelong friends. I would also say, if you are not 100%, then don't do it, because it will take so much of your time. And in the end, you are going to resent it.

Conceptual Student Development Framework

Findings of the study align with Nevitt Sanford's (1962a) psychosocial student development model of three evolving conditions for the academic success of a student. According to the model, three conditions must occur in a student collegiate experience:

1. Readiness: the maturity and preparedness of the student
2. Challenge: the necessary component to help guide the student through personal development
3. Support: providing an environment that is encouraging and allows the student to explore the conditions of his/her identity in a safe setting

Sanford (1962a) suggests that for growth to occur, a student must have a balanced amount of challenge and support appropriate for the task. As a first-generation female student-athlete, the women expressed a lack of direction and academic preparedness from the transition from high school to college. Some of the women expressed disappointment in the family members' lack of understanding of the college processes and required expectations academically and athletically. For some of the women, the lack of knowledge from their parents resulted in the women seeking guidance from their teammates to navigate through college. Other participants sought the guidance of the academic advisors, coaches, and upperclassmen on the

team. Reoccurring challenges for the women during college included academic requirements, expectations of coaches, faculty interactions, roommates, and the stress to compete at a high level of competition. The women described their first year as scary and challenging. While the experience was uncomfortable, learning to adjust to a new environment proved their readiness and maturity to acclimate to a new environment. The women looked up to their teammates to assist them with challenging professors and how to deal with the demands of coaches. According to Sanford's (1962a) theory, the element of readiness of a student suggests that an individual student will not grow until they are physically or psychologically ready to grow. The candid stories of the participants' challenges and perseverance during college are evidence of their personal growth throughout their four years while balancing athletics and academics. In alignment with Sanford's (1962a) theory of development, growth occurs in students when they provided challenges and support equally through a variety of experiences both academically and personally. As the women shared their experiences, it was evident their limits were tested daily. Once the self- discovery of their own identity emerged, balancing the duality of roles stimulated their aptitude to succeed and reach graduation.

Summary and Conclusion

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do first-generation female student-athletes balance the demands of college and athletics?
2. What are the barriers encountered during the college experience?

Findings from the participants' responses revealed four principal themes related to balancing the demands of college and athletics and the barriers affecting their experience:

- multifaceted athletic experience
- significance of family support
- overwhelming academic expectations
- navigating the college experience

Findings of the study revealed the participant's gratitude to have a positive college experience and to be a part of a program provided multiple opportunities for learning. The first-generation student-athletes valued the relationships they built with their teammates and coaches. Most of the participants agreed that the routine and discipline gained from their athletic experience tested their perseverance, taught them valuable lessons to prepare them for life, and challenged their limits. All six participants unanimously agreed that despite the progress women have made for equity, limited opportunities for the women to play sports professionally after college still exist. The former student-athletes shared they would like to see more women in administrative roles in athletics and expressed gratitude to have a female coach on staff as a mentor and Coach. Several of the participants shared their pride to be a part of an elite group of women in sports, specifically as a first-generation female athlete.

Family support was very important to their success in college and athletics. Many of the participants expressed a sincere appreciation for the sacrifices their parents made for them and felt a deep obligation to their parents to graduate from college. As they learned the value of being a first-generation college student, it was important for the participants of the study to make their parents proud since they never finished college. They also felt it was important to pave the way for other family members or their future children. The women learned to recognize their first-generation status provided them with a greater sense of accomplishment knowing the struggles they faced to complete their four-year degree.

The participants shared there was an adjustment period to the new environment of academics and athletics their first year in college. Finding the balance with practice, travel, and academics was a challenge for the women. They shared frustration understanding professors and their expectations as a first-year college student. Acknowledging their responsibilities for classes, the participants expressed frustration with faculty members that penalized them for time away for travel. Overall, the participants shared that the college experience was difficult and overwhelming and took time for them to find a way to balance athletics, academics, and adjust to a new environment. They learned to deal with challenging roommates, hotheaded coaches, and difficult faculty members. They persevered when they did not believe they could complete some of the daunting tasks they faced on a day-to-day basis.

Finally, it was learned through the multiple conversations that many of the women did not have a clear understanding of the term first-generation college student. Several participants did not know their first-generation status until they were invited to be part of the study. For some, being a first-generation college student became a reality when their parents arrived on campus and were unfamiliar with the business operations in higher education. For some participants, it was understanding how to prepare for college without parental guidance and support for college preparation. Lastly, some participants shared they did not know college was a possible option after high school. Once the women had a greater understanding of their first-generation status, they identified themselves as an elite class of women. To the participants, they believed they could accomplish anything they put their mind to do, even if obstacles were impeding their progress.

Chapter Five: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

This chapter will provide a summary and conclusion based on the data and findings presented in the previous chapter. The summary will include an in-depth discussion of the findings, a correlation of the data to the findings, and a relationship of the findings to the existing literature in research. The final discussion in this chapter will include implications of the study for action and recommendations for further research.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of the qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of academic success and barriers from the lens of the first-generation female student-athlete. Two main questions guided the study: (1) How do first-generation female student-athletes balance the demands of college and athletics? and (2) What are the barriers encountered during the college experience?

To prepare for a response to the two main questions, individual face-to-face interviews were scheduled with six first-generation female athletes that graduated within the last five years from college. The interviews were presented in a semi-structured manner and participants were asked open-ended questions. The approach for the study was an interpretive methodology to obtain a deeper understanding of the college experience from the perspective of a first-generation female college athlete.

During the interviews, participants shared their personal experiences as a first-generation female athlete while attending college. Four main themes emerged from the conversations: athletic experience is multifaceted, family support is significant to success, meeting academic expectations is overwhelming, and navigating the college experience is challenging.

During the conversations with the participants, the open-ended questions from the interviews prompted participants to reflect on both their challenges and accomplishments while

competing in an athletic program. The responses from their reflections provided meaningful insight into their daily interactions and provided firm evidence of their tenacity as first-generation female athletes.

Findings Linked to Current Research

Student developmental model theory. As the author of the study, it was significant to link the findings to a theoretical framework as a rationale and tool to interpret and understand how the female student-athletes learned and developed during college. Sanford's (1962a) challenge and readiness development theory was used as a theoretical framework to understand and explain the phenomena of the first-generation female student-athlete experience in college. During the analysis of data, Chickering and Reisser's (1993) education and identity model best-illustrated student development during college. Both theoretical models represented the various stages of student growth as the women encountered new experiences and challenges. Sanford's (1962a) theory brought focused attention to the first-year experience of students. As first-year student-athletes, the women shared their fears of leaving home, adjusting to a new environment in the dorms, acclimating to college life, and adjusting to a new team dynamic. Several women shared the challenge of making new friends and feeling stressed their first year. As the women began to develop and mature, their readiness to learn from new experiences provided opportunities with peers and members of the community. Interactions with teammates in a micro-community of shared responsibilities and commitment provided the students with an environment for support and challenge while upholding the expectations of the team.

Chickering's (1969a) psychosocial theory plays a significant role when examining the overall growth and identity development of college students. According to Chickering's (1969b)

seven vectors, student education and identify are present when a student learns to navigate through college. The term vector was used by Chickering (1969a) to imply directionality and magnitude of the student and is intended as a framework to promote individual growth in a unique and personal way. In the development model, Chickering recognized the need for students to grow with “differentiation and integration when encountering a complexity in ideas, values, and other people while struggling to reconcile their individual and own ideas, values, and beliefs” (Reis, n.d., para. 1). As the model became the leading student development theory in high education, Chickering and Reisser (1993) revised the model to represent a forward-thinking framework free from gender stereotypes and representative of college students from diverse backgrounds.

According to Chickering (1969b), the seven vectors promote the growth of the student during college. Chickering’s (1969b) first vector in the student development model is the ability to recognize and achieve competence. The author suggests that student development of competency emerges throughout the college years, when “knowledge acquisition, increased intellectual, aesthetic, and cultural sophistication and development of higher-order of cognitive skills are increased” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p.3). Through this philosophy, intellectual competence promotes growth through all vectors and is achieved through “events and objects of our experience” (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, p.62). The second vector, managing emotions, is a key point in the development process. According to Chickering and Reisser’s (1993) theory, it is important to the growth of the student to learn to manage emotions during college. Self-control and management of emotions play a significant role in student growth through self-awareness by self-reflection. The success of self-control is achieved when students learn to control impulsive reactions and learn to “balance assertiveness with tendencies toward participation” (Reis, n.d.,

para. 2). Autonomy toward interdependence is the third vector describing growth in one's ability to organize personal responsibilities, problem-solving, and decision making. According to Chickering's theory, movement on this vector relies on "equality and reciprocity on a greater scale involving community" (Reis, n.d., para. 2). In this vector, the need for balance emerges and promotes the necessity for independence and connection within a community, comparable to a team dynamic.

According to Chickering (1969c), the fourth vector of developing mature interpersonal relationships are vital in the personal growth of a student. Through this vector, the interactions encourage the establishment of identity by building a community with their peers, thus shaping the emergence of self (Reis, n.d., para.2). In the fifth vector in student development, the community encourages the shape of student identify. Self-identity emerges through the influence of multiple interactions within the community and is "shaped through the historical, social, and cultural conditions emanating from family and ethnic heritage" (Reis, n.d., para. 2). In the sixth vector, Chickering and Reisser (1993) emphasize the significance of intrapersonal relationships to establish a sense of purpose for the student. The daily intrapersonal interactions facilitate the development of personal values. The relationships developed with the community provide direction for the student, encouraging the emergence of evolving personal values in their decision making. In the last vector of growth, the development of integrity emerges. The social and responsible behavior illustrates the ability to navigate the college experience by "rebalancing personal values and beliefs" (Reis, n.d., para. 2). According to Reis (n.d.), through the development of integrity, students learn to recognize values previously considered as part of their identity and learn to reevaluate, internalize, and personalize their personal view on social and

responsible behavior through thoughtful reflection. The values the women demonstrated through their experience become evident through their acknowledgment of their identity.

During the conversations with the women, the participants revealed a lack of understanding of their first-generation identity. After our conversations, the women became aware of their cultural identity as first-generation student-athletes, the value in their accomplishments as women, and being the first to graduate from college in their family.

Athletic experience is multifaceted. Student-athletes had to learn how to navigate the demands of the athletic programs. The women learned how to communicate effectively and learned appropriate social behaviors to build and maintain successful relationships, such as challenges with coaches, gender inequities, and balancing the duality of roles. Linked to the findings of Chickering and Reisser's (1993) development theory, the first vector of mastering intellectual competence, physical and manual skills, and interpersonal competence supports the complexities of the athletic experience. The female student-athlete must learn how to navigate the demands of the athletic program while learning how to communicate effectively and engage in social behaviors to build and maintain successful relationships (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Findings from the student responses revealed multiple complexities and expectations required of student-athletes to remain eligible to play collegiate sports. When the participants were asked to share their college experience as a first-generation female athlete, the participants described their first year in athletics as a difficult adjustment to the new surroundings since they were unsure of what to expect as a first-year student-athlete. The research of Wilson and Pritchard (2005) support this finding by identifying a first-year student athlete's challenge of acclimating to a new environment. In some circumstances, the new surroundings intensify the student-athletes stress level. Several participants shared that acclimating to a new living environment with roommates

was challenging. For some of the participants, the changing environment increased the women's stress level since they lacked an understanding of the college process and how to adjust to residential living on campus. The demands of athletic programs for the student-athletes created additional stressors related to time management and managing multiple sport-related issues like competitive performance, injuries, team dynamics, and building a relationship with the coaching staff (Lu et al., 2012). Howard-Hamilton and Sina (2001) describe the student-athlete experience unlike that of a traditional student since the mandated athletic routines provide structure for the student-athlete. Maintaining academics was very important to the participants. Several participants shared it was challenging to maintain their academics while participating in sports.

Some participants expressed an initial concern not knowing how the men's team would treat them. Researchers confirm "college student-athletes endure multiple complications throughout their college life" (Bontemps, 2013, p. 1). Student-athletes condition themselves to compete with a mindset for mental toughness and focus despite an injury, exhaustion, coaches' expectations, and interactions with teammates (Bontemps, 2013). Overall, the women felt they were treated equally but cited several incidents when the men's team were given priority, or the women's teams were treated unfairly by the coaches due to an error on the men's team. The women also expressed disappointment for the lack of support in attendance at their home games, since the men's programs historically attract greater attendance and support from the community.

The participants shared their gratitude to their coaches for providing the opportunity to participate in collegiate sports. Most participants shared that the gender of the coach did not impact their experience as a female student-athlete, but agreed it was comforting to have a female on the coaching staff. Two-time championship female head basketball coach Muffet

McGraw describes that equitable resources and representation of female head coaches in sports has fallen drastically. McGraw was quoted during her interview stating, “in basketball specifically, the percent of women coaching women was 59.3 in 2018” (Doubek, 2019, para. 12). McGraw states, “when you look at men’s basketball, 99 % of the jobs go to men, why shouldn’t 100 or 99% of the jobs in women’s basketball go to women? Maybe it’s because we only have 10 percent, women, athletic directors in Division I. People hire people who look like them. And that’s the problem” (Doubek, 2019, para. 9). For the female athletes, since there were not any female head coaches on staff during their collegiate experience, the women learned to assimilate through the leadership of male coaches. The lack of experience did not provide the women with the opportunity to experience the leadership of a female head coach. McGraw describes the socialization as teaching women “men run the word” and collegiate female athletes today “do not have enough female role models, visible women leaders, and enough women in power” (Doubek, 2019, para. 7).

Howard-Hamilton and Sina (2001) affirm many athletes learn to speak the same language when communicating strategically during competitions. For the student-athlete, the women agree teamwork is a framework to winning. The women shared that their teammates will remain their lifelong friends and expressed the importance of trusting their teammates since they are a chief source of support during the college process. The participants emphasized that grades do matter after college since there are few opportunities for women to play professionally. The women advise future female athletes to have faith in their coach and get into the gym as much as possible outside practice. The former female student-athletes also recommend making sure collegiate athletes know that participating in sports is what they want to do, since it requires a

strong commitment to play, an extensive amount of their time, and they must be prepared with the mindset to win to be a competitive athlete.

Lastly, the women were significantly proud to be part of a team of women they considered to an elite group. The participants express an appreciation to have the opportunity to share the athletic experience with their teammates. They considered themselves as trailblazers for women in athletics since the program was new when they attended college. In alignment with Chickering and Reisser's (1993) student development model, the multifaceted athletic experience challenged the women to recognize their personal need for growth and encouraged the women to re-evaluate their personal attitudes, beliefs, and values during the collegiate career as an athlete.

Family support is significant to success. Participants expressed the importance of family support during college, as both athletics and academics were demanding. Participants shared they worked harder knowing they had their family support and wanted to make them proud. Lack of family support, extended family, and community support all contributed to the student becoming resourceful and communicative about their needs, thus leading to their success. Acknowledging balance and need for community is demonstrated in the fourth vector of Chickering and Reisser's (1993) development theory by building relationships for the allowance of self. Research suggests that a parent's involvement in their child's college preparation plays an essential role in their college success when a student transitions from high school to college (Terenzini et al., 1996). Participants shared meaningful events with their parents when they visited the college campus. One participant shared a moving story of her father's excitement when she was accepted to be part of the team and her admission into the university. Potuto and O'Hanlon (2007) report participation in athletics is a valuable part of student-athlete

development and is achieved with social and emotional support from their family. Participants expressed the importance of family support during college since both athletics and academics were demanding. Participants shared they worked harder knowing they had their family support and wanted to make them proud. They valued the interest their parents took leaning about their classes and appreciated their support at the games. Many researchers support the theory that parental involvement links to lower attrition rates and lowers stress levels for college students (Holahan, Valentiner, & Moos, 1994). Participants also shared it was helpful knowing you can count on your family members, since college was tough, and the stress of academics and athletics can be overwhelming.

Meeting academic expectations is overwhelming. Participants of the study shared maintaining academics was an important part of their college experience and the main goal of attending college. Chickering and Reisser (1993) recognize a student's abilities to achieve intellectual competence is attained once a student masters analytical and thinking skills. The scholars future note that a student must also exert control on their emotions to meet competencies academically and athletically. NCAA mandated all participating conferences to require all student-athletes to maintain a minimum of 12 hours per semester to remain eligible to play. As per the NCAA mandate, all student-athletes must follow the 12/24-hour rule to remain eligible and risk losing their certification to remain eligible to play. As per the NCAA mandate, all student-athletes must follow the 12/24-hour rule to remain eligible or risk losing their certification to play sports. Several participants had a goal to complete college in four years and graduate. Participants shared time management and balancing athletics and academics as the greatest challenges to overcome during college. During their college experience, student-athletes also shared they had to overcome challenges in working with faculty.

In the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) study, Potuto and O'Hanlon (2007) reported that approximately one-half of student-athletes surveyed revealed feeling discriminated against by professors simply by the association to their athletic participation. In the same study, 68% of student-athletes said they would have liked to spend more time on campus pursuing additional educational opportunities, but time constraints restricted their availability to participate. Participants agreed it was difficult understanding the expectations of professors and believed the limited knowledge of athletics by the professors resulted in student-athletes being penalized for time away from class. Jolly (2008) explains that most faculty members are flexible and willing to assist students, but some professors have specific restrictions not allowing students to reschedule exams and turn in late assignments after rigorous team travel.

Adapting to the academic challenges for the student-athlete is directly linked to all the vectors of the student development model. Chickering and Reisser (1993), recognize a student's ability to achieve competence intellectually when the student masters the knowledge acquisition and all seven vectors are achieved promoting the growth of their experiences. NCAA mandated all participating conferences to require all student-athletes to maintain a minimum of 12 hours per semester to remain eligible to play. One participant shared her academic experience of becoming ineligible to participate in athletics when she dropped one of her classes. As per the NCAA mandate, all student-athletes must follow the 12/24-hour rule to remain eligible and risk losing their certification to play sports. Another participant shared that professors did not pay attention when they were gone or would not give the student-athletes special treatment for missing class due to travel. Jolly (2008) describes the interaction with faculty as an inhibition for students for fear of being labeled "unintelligent and unable to maintain the academic rigor" (p.16).

Navigating the college experience. Several of the participants shared fears of leaving home and how adjusting to a new environment was overwhelming their first year in college. Chickering and Reisser (1993) recount that the social and responsible behavior of the student-athlete emerges when a student can rebalance personal values and beliefs through self-discovery. As Howard-Hamilton and Sina (2001) state, “when student-athletes attend college, they are provided the opportunities to interact with a diverse group of individuals from various racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds” (p.35). The scholars also suggest that through interaction with a diverse group of peers, the interaction positively influences the learning of student-athletes. Warner (2016) describes the college experience for the first-generation student-athlete as a challenge to acclimate within the community and requires the ability to balance the duality as a student and athlete. Chickering and Reisser (1993) suggest student development occurs through self-reflection of previous and personal social behavior by allowing a new perspective while engaged in learning. During the interviews, participants shared navigating through the college experience presented different challenges. One participant expressed her appreciation for the support of her family but often looked to the guidance of her teammates with academics since her parents did not attend college. Another participant shared her first-time experience arriving at college with her father and sitting in the financial aid office. She describes the experience as overwhelming and how lost she felt since her father did not understand the financial aid process.

Warner (2016) describes the first-generation college student-athlete experience as a unique challenge of discovering their social identity and testing their relationships with their teammates. Participants in the study shared that daily interactions with their teammates facilitated their ability to navigate through college since their parents did not have an awareness

of not understanding the demands of college as a student and athlete. Participants were appreciative for the guidance from the upperclassmen on their team and agreed the firsthand experience helped prepare them both academically and athletically when navigating through college. Participants also shared that daily interactions provided the opportunity to build lifelong friendships since they relied on the experience of their teammates.

Lohfink and Paulsen (2005) describe the student-athlete as feeling ostracized by the academic community since the lack of understanding by the parent inhibits their ability to provide support for the student. Warner (2016) suggests social identity is developed through team influence, cohesion within the team, and support from the community. In alignment with Chickering and Reisser (1993), the participant's experiences developed as a result of their social and responsible behavior while navigating the college experience. Through this experience, the women learned to re-evaluate and balance their personal values and beliefs through the self-discovery of their identity.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand a first-generation female athlete's perspective regarding their experience as a "student" and "athlete" while attending college. The data revealed participants valued the college experience and the life lessons learned as a student and athlete. Their participation in athletic programs required a significant sacrifice of their time to meet the demands of both domains in college. It taught the women self-discipline, commitment, mental toughness, and how to overcome adversity. The challenges they encountered while balancing the dualities of roles motivated their persistence to complete graduation. Consistent with the dominant values revealed in the responses of the participants,

their attitudes based on their personal beliefs guided them through the college experience and prepared them for valuable lessons in life.

According to Valentine and Taub (1999), Chickering and Reisser's (1993) developmental model offers a solid framework to build practical solutions for student-athletes and provides a systematic means to provide the necessary resources for student-athletes to be successful in college. In Chickering and Reisser's (1993) revised theory, the student-athlete experience can be evaluated through an examination of increased developmental competency in three areas: intellectual, physical and manual skills, and interpersonal relationships. Valentine and Taub (1999) recognize Chickering's (1969a) psychosocial model as a useful framework for the developing needs of student-athletes. The scholars confirm student-athletes face substantial challenges in their development and confront unique issues during their athletic experience in college. Parham (1993) points out that student-athletes must learn to balance the social demands of college, maintain athletic conditioning, and learn to adjust to life without sports once athletic eligibility has been completed. Gardner (2009) notes the equal balance of challenge and support in Sanford's (1962a) readiness, challenge, and support model demonstrates the former female student athlete's ability to cope with emerging situations in their intellectual and emotional development (p. 15). This is evident through their commitment to overcoming challenges in both academics and athletics, and persistence to graduation. Consistent with the four emerging themes, the women shared their college experiences as an athlete provided them the opportunity to develop lifelong friendships with their teammates.

Implications

During the conversations with the participants, significant aspects of their experience were revealed in the study. Throughout my interactions with the female student-athletes, I

learned of the limited opportunities for female athletes during their college experience. The conversations revealed their perception of gender inequities they believed to exist in collegiate sports. Most participants shared they did not feel their male coaches treated them differently but agreed in the value of having a female coach on staff to serve as a resource and role model. Based on their responses, the lack of interaction with women leaders in athletics deprived them of the first-hand opportunity to mentor with women in leadership roles and authority. In alignment with Muffet McGraw's perspective in a recent statement regarding gender inequity in collegiate athletics as an NCAA Division 1 Head Coach,

when you look at men's basketball, 99% of the jobs go to men, why shouldn't 100% or 99% of the jobs in women's basketball go to women? Maybe it's because we only have 10% women athletic directors in Division 1. People hire people who look like them. That's the problem. (Gardner, A., 2019)

One of the chief challenges a first-generation student must master is the practicality and knowledge to acclimate between two very different environments, academics and family (Stebbleton & Soria, 2012). Upon the first meeting with participants, the responses from the interview revealed limited knowledge of their identity as a first-generation college student. The lack of awareness may have inhibited their opportunity to explore available educational resources, scholarships, and other degrees of study. The limited knowledge may have also inadequately prepared them for the challenges a first-generation college student may face during college. Throughout the conversations, the women shared they did not have a clear understanding of their first-generation classification when they first attended college. It was not until the student-athletes participated in academic support programs, graduation, or through participation in this study that they understood the value of their status. By the end of our conversations, the women had greater self-awareness of the term, expressed a sincere appreciation for their status, and valued the experience it had for women in athletics. One

participant shared she wished the term first-generation college student was openly shared when she attended high school. The participant also shared if she knew the significance of her first-generation identity, she would have applied for more scholarship opportunities for female student-athletes.

The women revealed they considered their teammates to be a primary means of support as first-generation female athletes. Since they spend an extensive amount of time as a group, the women became comfortable in their environment and sought support from each other. Student-athletes spend an extensive amount of time together and may encounter similar experiences as first-generation students. The challenges they shared were relatable to their peers during the college experience. Consistent with the research, teamwork for the student-athlete was not limited to winning games but building relationships for support (Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001). Consistent with the theoretical framework for the study, Nevitt Sandford's Psychosocial development model links the readiness, challenge, and support of female student-athletes by suggesting the female athlete will thrive in college when provided an equal balance of challenge and support. Findings from the study reveal the participants built a strong trust with their teammates and felt comfortable seeking guidance from their peers. The support of their peers-built trust among the women on matters related to college, especially since their parents did not understand academia nor expectations of faculty.

Challenges with faculty was a reoccurring finding from the study. The women expressed a sincere desire for faculty support. Participants agreed it was their responsibility to maintain their grades to remain eligible to play sports. Multiple responses in the data revealed professors lacked an understanding of the demands of student-athletes. Several participants recommended faculty

remain open to understanding the stress related to balancing travel, practices, coaches, injuries, and the overall demands of student-athletes.

Based on the findings of this study, the data revealed the importance of an equal balance of challenge and support for the female student-athlete. As innate competitors, the data revealed the tenacity of the women to overcome multiple challenges both athletically and academically. In alignment with Nevitt Sanford's (1962a) readiness, challenge, and support, the findings of the study revealed the day-to-day challenges with coaches and faculty provide the necessary challenges the students need for personal development. This is evident in the data revealing the student-athletes appreciation for the influence of the coaches to push their athletic limits. The student-athletes persistence to meet the challenges also suggests a level of maturity to respond positively to a challenge (Gardner, 2009).

Findings also revealed the significance of support to the success of the student-athlete academically and athletically. All participants shared the importance of family while attending college. Since the women were all first-generation college students, the women relied on the guidance of their teammates in academics and athletics. The familiarity of their surroundings created an environment that encouraged the students to explore conditions relating to their identity as an athlete in a safe setting that leads to their success (Gardner, 2009). For the first-generation female student-athlete, when self-awareness of their identity emerged, the student-athlete learned to positively accept the support of their environment and attain the aptitude to be successful in both athletics and academics (Gardner, 2009).

In summary, implications for practitioners include the re-evaluation of recruitment and hiring of women in sports and providing legitimate opportunities for women leaders to enter in administrative positions in athletics. Opportunities must be made available for women in sport

governance as active participants to provide contributions from the female perspective. Women must be accepted into the athletic domain for their actual athletic abilities in an environment free from gender and stereotyped roles. Finally, women must be given equal opportunities in leadership positions.

Recommendations

This study was conducted to obtain a deeper understanding of the lens of the first-generation female student-athlete. Participants for the study were female student-athletes alumnae that graduated within the last five years from the date of the study. The participants must have been certified to play in the NAIA and self-identified as a first-generation college student. Based on the data, the following are recommendations for future research:

1. A qualitative study exploring faculty's perception and understanding of the demands of a female college athlete.
2. The National Athletic Intercollegiate Association (NAIA), is an athletic conference serving smaller institutions.
 - a. A qualitative study exploring first-generation female student-athletes experience at Division 1 institutions will provide greater insight into the effectiveness of the systematic support systems mandated by the NCAA.
3. Further studies exploring the first-generation student-athlete experience and student-athlete identity.
4. A qualitative study of exploring male coaches' perspective when working with a first-generation female college student.
5. A qualitative study of exploring female coaches' perspective when working with a first-generation female college student.

6. Conduct a qualitative study exploring a first-generation female college coaches experience coaching in a Division 1 NCAA institution.

Muffet McGraw publicly stated “We don’t have enough female role models. We don’t have enough visible women leaders. We don’t have enough women in power” (Gardner, 2019, p.2). It is important to the progression of female athletes to explore the experiences of female coaches and provide a voice for the women in leadership. The inquiry will provide insight into obtaining a deeper understanding of their influence on emerging first-generation female athletes. A qualitative study will also provide insight from female coaches’ personal perspective and challenges they experience in a male-dominated field.

Researcher’s Reflection

As the author of this study, the qualitative design provided the opportunity to gain in-depth insight from the lens of the first-generation female athlete. The conversations we shared provided me the opportunity to become part of the experiences of the young women participating in collegiate athletics. This interaction allowed me to build trust with the women and create a safe environment for the participants to openly share their college experience.

As an administrator, educator, and advocate for students for over 20 years in higher education, I have dealt extensively with student-athletes regarding academics, athletics, eligibility, discipline, and other related student matters. Findings of the study related to the conceptual framework of Sanford (1962a) and Chickering and Reisser (1993) represent the various stages the women encountered throughout their college experience. The development theories supported the significance of an equal balance of support for growth to occur. Based on the findings of the four dominant themes: athletic experience is multifaceted, the significance of family support, meeting academic expectations, and navigation through the college experience, I

learned that each participant has the tenacity and perseverance to navigate through multiple challenges. Based on their responses, I learned they were task and goal-oriented, and natural competitors. This is illustrated in the stages of development during their college experience leading to their identity.

David Kolb (1984) developed an experiential learning model based on a four-stage learning cycle: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. According to Kolb (1984), “Learning is an internal cognitive process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (p. 38). The learning theory suggests “learning involves the acquisition of abstract concepts that can be applied flexibly in a range of situations and help strengthen the learning cycle for students” (McCleod, 2017, p. 1). According to Kolb (1984), as human beings, we are shaped by our concrete experiences as adults and learn best when the experience is kinesthetic. Kolb (1984) describes the physical learning as “scenarios with the power to create experiences that are not easily forgotten” (Gutierrez, 2018, p. 9). Based on the responses from the female-athletes, their hands-on experience was memorable and provided the women the opportunity to develop close connections with their coaches, teammates, and members of the university. Kolb (1984) further demonstrates the theory in the next cycle of reflective observation. This step is achieved when an individual gains knowledge and can analyze processes and procedures encouraging deeper reflection to acquire knowledge. For the former female athletes, the opportunity to reflect on their athletic collegiate experience provided a gateway to rediscover elements of college they may or may have not considered in preparation for life. This is evident in the lack of awareness of their first-generation identity and as a female-student athlete in collegiate sports. Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory also suggests that the success of learning is achieved when the learner demonstrates the ability to

think critically and decode abstract concepts. For the first-generation female student-athlete, the women were challenged to overcome obstacles associated with academics, travel for athletics, maintain eligibility, overcome injuries, intrapersonal relationships, team dynamics, and interactions with coaches. In some cases, the women were faced with situations that provided limited opportunities to share their voice as a female student-athlete. This required self-discovery and initiative to learn how to critically assess situations, make decisions, and become an advocate for their education and place on the team. When dealing with faculty members, participants learned the importance of developing a relationship with professors by establishing ongoing correspondence to be academically successful.

This leads to Kolb's (1984) fourth stage in the learning cycle. Through the experiences as a first-generation female student-athlete, the women learned to become advocates for their education and as athletes. Their hands-on learning through active experimentation allowed the women to engage in hands-on learning in communication, leadership and maintaining eligibility to play college sports.

As the researcher for the study, a deeper reflection of the findings revealed a naiveté in their perspective from their experiences. The limited knowledge of their identity as a first-generation college student did not occur for some of the participants until they reached college. For this study, responses revealed a significant gap in the number of female coaches accessible as mentors for the women throughout their college career. As a first-generation female administrator in athletics working in a field dominated by men, it was important to unveil the significance of equitable opportunities available to female student-athletes. Based on the responses, the participants shared equitable resources were not always available for the women during their time in college. While their experiences with their male coaches may be positive

from their perspective, some of the responses suggest there may have been aspects of the relationships between the male coach and female student-athletes that undervalued their role as women in sports.

For administrators and women in athletics, it is imperative opportunities for women to continue to grow in the field of athletics. As educators engaging with female student-athletes, we must be cognizant of the dualities of roles female athletes balance and support their efforts as competitors. We must provide a voice for women in athletics and must continue to advocate for the advancement of women in the competitive world of collegiate and professional sports. As researchers, we must continue to seek ways to increase the knowledge base of women in athletics by filling the gap of available research related to women. As the number of female college athletes, coaches, and administrators increases, it is essential to the success of emerging women leaders in sports to conduct research representing a segment of marginalized women who were not previously recognized in the literature. Women must also commit to exploring topics relevant to the new generation of diverse female athletes emerging in sports.

For the future female student-athletes, intentional efforts to reevaluate the recruitment and hiring of women in sports must occur to formally legitimize opportunities for women leaders entering coaching and administrative positions in athletics. The results to this study will provide the opportunity for an open dialogue for decision-makers to reevaluate the roles women play in the athletic domain and will provide institutions, athletic administrators, coaching staff, and advocates for women in sports to initiate discussions promoting gender equity in sports.

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Appendices

Appendix A IRB Approval Letter



May 23 2018

To: Ms Adrienne Rodriguez

From: University of the Incarnate Word Institutional Review Board, FWA00009201

Adrienne:

Your request to conduct the study titled "Balancing the Demands of College and Athletics: A First-Generation Female Athlete's Perspective of the College Experience" was approved by Exempt review on 05/23/2018. Your IRB approval number is 18-05-006. You have approval to conduct this study through 5/23/19.

Please keep in mind the following responsibilities of the Principal Investigator:

1. Conducting the study only according to the protocol approved by the IRB.
2. Submitting any changes to the protocol and/or consent documents to the IRB for review and approval prior to the implementation of the changes. Use the **IRB Amendment Request form**.
3. Ensuring that only persons formally approved by the IRB enroll subjects.
4. Reporting immediately to the IRB any severe adverse reaction or serious problem, whether anticipated or unanticipated.
5. Reporting immediately to the IRB the death of a subject, regardless of the cause.
6. Reporting promptly to the IRB any significant findings that become known in the course of the research that might affect the willingness of the subjects to participate in the study or, once enrolled, to continue to take part.
7. Timely submission of an annual status report. Use the **IRB Study Status Update**.
8. Completion and maintenance of an active (non-expired) CITI human subjects training certificate.
9. Timely notification of a project's completion. Use the **IRB Closure form**.

Approval may be suspended or terminated if there is evidence of a) noncompliance with federal regulations or university policy or b) any aberration from the current, approved protocol.

If you need any assistance, please contact the UTW IRB representative for your college/school or the Office of Research Development.

Sincerely,

Ana Hagendorf, PhD, CPRA

Ana Hagendorf, PhD, CPRA
 Research Officer, Office of Research Development
 University of the Incarnate Word
 (210) 805-3036
 wandless@uiwb.edu

Appendix B
Notice of Approval to Begin Research-Exempt Status

NOTICE OF APPROVAL TO BEGIN RESEARCH

EXEMPT STATUS

Approval Date: May 24, 2018

PI Name: Adrienne Rodriguez

Faculty Advisor: n/a

Title of Study: Balancing the Demands of College and Athletics: A First-Generation Female Athlete's Perspective of the College Experience

The application you submitted for IRB review has been reviewed and determined to be Exempt from further review. Your study qualifies for exemption based on federal guidelines and no follow up with the IRB is required. You may begin data collection.

CHANGES – The PI must receive approval from the IRB before initiating any changes, including those required by the sponsor, which would affect human subjects. Such changes include changes in methods or procedures, numbers or kinds of human subjects, or revisions to the informed consent document or process. In addition, co-investigators must also receive approval from the IRB.

UNANTICIPATED RISK OR HARM– The PI will immediately inform the IRB of any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others, of any serious harm to subjects.

Approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB. The IRB has the authority to inspect any research records and practices associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about IRB procedures or monitoring or need assistance from the Board, please contact the Board at [REDACTED]

CC: IRB



IRB Chair

Appendix C IRB Approval for Continued Review



May 1, 2019

PI: Ms. Adrienne Rodriguez

Protocol title: Balancing the Demands of College and Athletics: A First-Generation Female Athlete's Perspective of the College Experience

Adrienne:

Your request for continued review of Exempt protocol 18-05-006 titled "Balancing the Demands of College and Athletics: A First-Generation Female Athlete's Perspective of the College Experience" was approved. This approval will expire **one year** from 05/01/2019.

Please keep in mind these additional IRB requirements:

- Request for continuing review must be completed for projects extending past one year. Use the **IRB Continuing Review Request** form.
- Changes in protocol procedures must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Use the **IRB Amendment Request** form.
- Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others must be reported immediately.

Approved protocols are filed by their number. Please refer to this number when communicating about this protocol.

Approval may be suspended or terminated if there is evidence of a) noncompliance with federal regulations or university policy or b) any aberration from the current, approved protocol. Congratulations and best wishes for successful completion of your research. If you need any assistance, please contact the UTW IRB representative for your college/school or the Office of Research Development.

Sincerely,

Mary Jo Bilicek
Research Compliance Coordinator
University of the Incarnate Word
(210) 805-3565
bilicek@uiwtx.edu

Appendix D Invitation Letter to Participants

[REDACTED]

I am currently a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Incarnate Word, completing my doctoral studies under the guidance of Dr. Norman St. Clair, Director of Graduate Studies. I am contacting you to invite you to participate in a research study I am conducting to fulfill dissertation requirements to complete the doctoral program.

The focus of the study is to understand how a first-generation female student-athlete balances the demands of athletics and academics. The purpose of study is to explore the perceptions of academic success and barriers from the lens of the first-generation female student-athlete.

The title of the study is: *Balancing the Demands of College and Athletics: A First-Generation Female Athlete's Perspective of the College Experience*

Targeted audiences for the proposed study are first-generation female student-athletes. Through the process of sharing your collegiate experience, you will be provided the opportunity to share your voice in an arena that is typically male dominated and underrepresented by women in athletic administrative positions. Your participation will provide insight into the challenges women experience as collegiate athletes and as a first-generation college student. Your insight will greatly contribute to the body of knowledge of Women in Athletics.

You are being asked to participate in the study because:

- 1) you have been identified as a first-generation female student athlete
- 2) you have been certified to play in the NAIA
- 3) graduated from college within the last 5 years

The project will involve:

- A face-to-face interview and a follow-up meeting to review your responses.
- The first visit will take 90 minutes, followed by a 30 minute a follow-up review.
- The estimated total time combined for both visits is 2 hours.
- There are no risks associated with the study.
- Your participation is voluntary.
- You may decide not to participate at any time.

If you would like to participate in the study, I am happy to provide you detailed information about the study, in addition to formal consent forms to participate. If you are unable to be part of the study and would like to refer me to a teammate who meets the criteria of the study, please feel free to share the information and ask them to contact me directly.

Thank you in advance for your support and I look forward to your response,

Adrienne Rodriguez

Ph.D. Candidate

University of the Incarnate Word

Appendix E Consent to Participate

Subject Consent to Take Part in a Study of
University of the Incarnate Word

Authorized Study Personnel: **Adrienne Rodriguez, Doctoral Candidate**
UIW Dreeben School of Education
adrodri5@student.uiwtx.edu

Description of the research and your participation

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Ph.D. student, Adrienne Rodriguez, under the supervision of Dr. Norman St. Clair, in the Dreeben School of Education at the University of the Incarnate Word.

Key Information: If you agree to take part in the study, you will be asked to sign the consent form below to participate in the study.

The purpose of the research is to explore the perceptions of academic success and barriers from the lens of the first-generation female student-athlete.

The project will involve:

- A face-to-face interview and a follow-up meeting to review your responses.
- The first visit will take 90 minutes, followed by a 30 minute review of responses.
- The estimated total time combined for both visits is 2 hours.
- There are no risks associated with the study.
- Your participation is voluntary and you may decide not to participate at any time.
- You will not be paid for your participation in the study.

The information in this form is meant to help you decide whether or not to participate. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me directly.

Why are you being asked to be in this research study?

You are being asked to be in this study because

- 1) you have been identified as a female first-generation female student athlete
- 2) you have were certified to play in the NAIA
- 3) graduated from college within the last 5 years

What is the reason for doing this research study?

The purpose of this study is to gain a greater understanding of how you navigated through the college experience while balancing academics and athletics.

What will be done during this research study?

- 1) You will meet with the investigator for a preliminary interview for 90 minutes.
- 2) A follow-up meeting will be scheduled to review your responses and ensure the transcriptions accurately reflect your responses.
- 3) The face-to-face interview will be audio-recorded to ensure your responses are accurately noted. The researcher will keep the recordings on a secured on a file and will only be used by the investigator to review your responses. If you prefer not to be audio-recorded, notes will be taken during the interview.

Appendix E-Continued Consent to Participate

- 4) A pseudonym will be used to protect your identity and the researcher may quote your remarks in presentations or articles resulting from this work.
- 5) The data you provide will be destroyed within 3 year(s) after the completion of this study.

What are the possible risks of being in this study?

Your participation in this study does not involve any physical or emotional risk to you beyond that of everyday life. Please inform the researcher if you experience any of the following during the interview:

- 1) If you feel emotional or upset when answering some of the questions, feel free to tell the interviewer at any time if you wish to take a break or stop the interview.
- 2) If you feel uncomfortable with some of the questions and topics, you are free to not answer or to skip to the next question.

As with all research, there is a chance that confidentiality of the information collected from you could be breached. As the principal investigator, the researcher will make every effort to take steps to minimize this risk, as discussed in more detail below in this form.

What are the possible benefits to you?

You are not expected to receive any benefits from being in this study.

What are the possible benefits to other people?

The benefits of the research include female student athletes, administrators, athletic teams, faculty members, coaches, policy makers within the institution, and athletic conference administrators. Through the process of sharing their collegiate experience, female-athletes will have the opportunity to share their voice in an arena that is typically male dominated and underrepresented by women in athletic administrative positions. Results from the study will provide insight into the challenges collegiate female student-athletes experience as athletes and as a first-generation college student. The responses from interviews will illuminate and clarify significant issues from the perspective of the female athlete and provide a better understanding on how to develop effective support systems for the current generation of women navigating athletics and academia.

What will being in this research study cost you?

There is no cost to you to be in this research study.

How will information about you be protected?

Everything you share in the study will be confidential. The only persons who will have access to your research records are the study personnel, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and any other person, agency, or sponsor as required by law. If we publish with results of the study, you will not be identified in any way.

Data collected will be stored in a locked cabinet in the principal investigator's office and will only be seen by the researcher during the study and for 3 years after the study is complete.

What will happen if you decide not to be in this research study or decide to stop participating once you start?

You can choose to stop participating in this research study at any time, for any reason. You do not have to answer any question you do not want to answer. Deciding not to be in this research study or deciding to withdraw will not affect your relationship with the investigator or with the University of the Incarnate Word. If you decide to withdraw from the study, the researcher will ask you if the information already collected from you can be used in the study.

Appendix E-Continued Consent to Participate

What should you do if you have a problem or question during this research study?

If you have additional questions about your rights or wish to report a problem that may be related to the study, please contact the University of the Incarnate Word Institutional Review Board office at 210-805-3036.

Consent

Your signature indicates that you (1) consent to take part in this research study, (2) that you have read and understand the information given above, and (3) that the information above was explained to you, and you have been given the chance to discuss it and ask questions. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

Name of Principal Investigator/Designee

Signature of Principal Investigator/Designee

Date

Appendix F
Interview Questions

BALANCING THE DEMANDS OF COLLEGE AND ATHLETICS:
A FIRST-GENERATION FEMALE ATHLETE'S PERSPECTIVE OF THE COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

Interview Questions

1. What were your goals in attending college?
2. Tell me about your college selection process.
3. Tell me about the education of your parents/guardians.
4. What kind of family support do you have?
5. Describe your experience as a first-year student-athlete.
 - a. Did you have any special challenges?
 - b. Was there anyone or anything that provided support?
6. Tell me about your experience in athletics.
7. How has your experience as a student and athlete affected your progress in school?
8. As you look back on your college experience, what were some milestones as a student-athlete?
9. As you look back on your college experience, what were some academic milestones you have encountered?
10. Can you think of a time in your college experience when there was a conflict between athletics and academics? What exactly happened?
11. Tell me about your experience as a female student and athlete.
12. What would you share with other female athletes about the college experience?
13. What are some ways in which being a first-generation female student athlete has influenced your academic experience? Can you share some examples?