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"EXAMINING PERSONAL BRANDING STRATEGIES AND PERCEPTIONS OF
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EXAMINING PERSONAL BRANDING STRATEGIES AND PERCEPTIONS OF
PREFERRED BRAND IDENTITY OF FEMALE COLLEGIATE ATHELTES

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Abstract

Student-athlete branding opportunities are vastly expanding as more opportunities are given using athlete's name, image, and likeness (NIL). However, a research gap exists between examining branding opportunities and perceptions of branding among different groups such as female student-athletes. This thesis examined the opinions and perceptions of female student-athlete branding, perceptions of NIL compensation and policies, and perceptions of potential barriers in the brand building process.

This quantitative study utilized survey methods to examine any differences between female student-athletes of different academic year, political affiliation, and sport played. A 49-item online survey was distributed to 100 NCAA Division I female student-athletes. Participants were asked to complete the survey which consisted of multiple-choice and 5-point Likert-scale items regarding branding, NIL, and branding barriers among female athletes

Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) were run on the data in SPSS to answer the 5 research questions posed in this study. Results indicated that there were significant differences between female student-athlete perceptions of branding via social media, NIL compensation and policies, and perceived branding barriers. The outcomes, limitations, and conclusions are discussed in the corresponding sections of the paper.

Keywords: branding, NIL, branding barriers, female student-athletes

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PERSONAL BRANDING AND BRAND IDENTITY OF FEMALE COLLEGIATE ATHLETES

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Female athletes encounter a myriad of barriers in building their personal brand, which is a challenge not commonly shared by their male counterparts (Lobpries, Bennett, & Brison, 2018). Sport management research suggests that progress has been made regarding how female athletes can market themselves in a way that displays their skills and image over femininity and socialized gender norms (Kane, LaVoi, & Fink, 2013). However, events such as the 2021 NCAA Women's Basketball Tournament highlight differences such as below-average weight rooms and lack of branding in venues and on television highlight the gender disparities female athletes continue to face at multiple levels of sport (Hensley-Clancy, 2021). With student-athletes gaining more rights to benefit from their individual name, image, and likeness (NIL), research can provide insight into student-athlete perceptions of education, proper brand management, and student-athlete compensation (Grambeau, 2020). With the ability to benefit from their individual NIL, another phenomenon to consider is the way student-athletes develop their brand through social media. Considering the current field of research on female athlete branding, the purpose of this study is to examine the opinions and perceptions of female student-athlete branding, perceptions of NIL compensation and policies, and perceptions of potential barriers in the brand building process.

Statement of the Problem

Sport management scholars claim that a strong brand identity is crucial to helping an athlete successfully build their brand (Arai, Ko, & Ross, 2014). Due to barriers in the brand building process such as expecting to fulfill certain social roles, female athletes do not have the

ability to market themselves and express their brand identity (Shaw & Frisby, 2006; Cooky, Council, Mears, & Messner, 2021). Most of the relevant literature on athlete branding is limited to conceptual pieces, case studies, and managerial perspectives of the phenomena for primarily male athletes (Arai et al., 2014; Parmentier & Fischer, 2012; Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2012). The limited amount of exposure and relevant literature on female athlete branding hinders the initial process of brand identity creation which is to establish, create, and communicate a brand identity that differentiates the athlete from others (Ghodeswar, 2008). This study addresses an important gap in sport marketing literature regarding the branding barriers female athletes face to build their brand in a predominately masculine sport industry.

Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine female student-athlete's perceptions of brand identity, personal branding, branding barriers, and compensation from individual NIL. Branding theories can be applied to female athletes as human brands to understand personal brand building practices and any potential changes. Quantitative research methods will be used to identify significant relationships between student-athletes and their perceptions of the variables. This study utilized a survey to ask female student-athletes about: 1) defining brand identity (Aaker, 1996), 2) defining personal brand (Brogan, 2015), 3) perceived branding barriers (Lobpries et al., 2018), and 4) NIL compensation (Grambeau, 2020).

Utilizing brand identity theory, this study will consider multiple research questions to examine the perceptions of branding strategies among female student-athletes. Research questions are appropriate when a researcher is unsure about the nature of the phenomenon being investigated (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). Due to the gap in female student-athlete branding research, developing research questions is the most appropriate strategy to provide indications

about something and not be limited to investigating relationships between variables. Although the intent of research questions is to gather preliminary data, testable hypotheses can possibly be developed from the information gathered from the research questions (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011).

Additional research on these phenomena has the potential to provide solutions for branding barriers or other challenges faced by female athletes who are trying to build stronger brands. By collecting and analyzing data on the perceptions of those directly affected by these changes and issues, this study can be used not only among student-athletes, but other stakeholders including NCAA staff, member conferences and institutions, college athletic departments, and other practitioners in the sports industry.

Delimitations of the Study

Little research has been conducted to examine how social media platforms are changing athlete self-presentation practices (Doyle, Su, & Kunkel, 2020). The Model of Athlete Branding via Social Media addresses this research gap by examining how consumers' social media engagement is influenced by the type of content in an athlete's post (Doyle et al., 2020). This model includes four concepts including athletic performance, attractive appearance, marketable lifestyle, and offstage content. The first three concepts are shared from the Model of Athlete Branding (MABI), created by Arai, Ko, and Ross (2014). Athletic performance includes elements that reflect an athlete's on-field performance, attractive appearance includes content showcasing an athlete's physical attributes and characteristics, and marketable lifestyle describes off-field characteristics of an athlete (Doyle et al., 2020). The fourth concept, offstage content, is a form of self-promotion unique to social media and not considered by previous research (Doyle et al., 2020). Offstage content is when an athlete does not include their physical presence while

not emphasizing their professional or personal components of their brand such as a humorous piece of text or an aspirational quote that doesn't include the physical presence of the athlete (Doyle et al., 2020).

Social media continues to be major platforms for athletes to build and promote their personal brands (Park, Williams, & Son, 2020; Bender, 2020). Findings from the Model of Athlete Branding via Social Media conclude that athletic performance generated the highest amount of consumer engagement, but offstage content generated more engagement than both attractive appearance and marketable lifestyle (Doyle et al., 2020). As student-athletes look to increase engagement through social media, their use of offstage content should be monitored. Would offstage content generate more engagement and opportunities as more student-athletes look to benefit from their NIL? While offstage content gains a lot of engagement now, future studies should consider measuring the effectiveness of offstage content and other potential variables over an extended period. This study considers that not only is social media a key tool for athlete branding, but the type of content an athlete posts via social media can impact their brand as well. What this study does not intend to examine are the individual posts from female student-athletes or any relationships between the concept of offstage content and female student-athletes. Analyzing content generated by female athletes would only provide an educated guess on their perceptions of preferred branding strategies and brand identity while other research methods such as surveys and interviews can provide more valid data directly from the athlete.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section provides a review of relevant literature on the background of branding and the concept of branding athletes. Then, literature on gender and athlete branding along with various barriers of female athlete branding are thoroughly discussed. Finally, a section on brand identity theory and various brand identity models is provided and followed with the research questions of this study.

Branding

To preface the discussion of this study, a conceptual background of branding must be laid out to provide context on the purpose of branding and how it relates to the current study. The original concept of branding began as a sign, usually a form of marking on an object to denote its meaning in a form of naming something (Bastos & Levy, 2012). It was not until the early 20th century that branding was referred to as an aggressive sales method in marketing and advertising (Bastos & Levy, 2012). Research implies that branding is a device for learning and communication to convey aspects of identity and association, or disassociation from other brands (Bastos & Levy, 2012). Branding has strong ties to both business and research as the concept becomes multi-dimensional and malleable through advances in research and technology (Bastos & Levy, 2012; de Chernatony, 1999).

Constructs such as brand positioning (Kapferer, 1997; Ghodeswar, 2008), brand personality (Carlson & Donavan, 2013; Khedher, 2010), brand relationships (de Chernatony, 1999) brand identity (de Chernatony, 1999; Kapferer, 1997; Aaker, 1996), and brand equity (Aaker, 1991; Parmentier & Fischer, 2012) are all derived from the evolution of branding theory

and research. Brand positioning refers to where a brand belongs in a consumer's mind and how it differentiates itself from other brands (Kapferer, 1997). Brand personality is the set of human traits that are relevant and applicable to a brand (Carlson & Donavan, 2013). Brand relationships are formed after a brand's personality is defined and constantly changes as a brand's values, personality, and positioning evolves over time (de Chernatony, 1999). The direction, purpose, and meaning of a brand refers to its brand identity which is the central strategic vision of the brand (Aaker, 1996). A brand's equity is comprised of a set of assets linked to the brand that add or subtract the value of the brand to the consumer (Aaker, 1991). As the definition and concepts of branding expand, it is important to research and observe branding across different media. This study focuses on the conceptual background of branding and how it relates to female athletes in sport.

Branding and the Concept of Branding Athletes

Kotler and Levy (1969) were among the first researchers to establish that marketing goes beyond the selling of tangible products and can be applied to people as well. The concept of personal marketing was created to suggest that humans can be marketed just like products when looking for employment or running for a political office (Kotler & Levy, 1969). The concept of personal marketing later evolved into personal branding during the late 20th and early 21st century. Personal branding is the process of establishing a unique personal identity, communicating that brand identity to a targeted audience, and accomplishing personal and professional objectives (Kedher, 2010). Personal branding coach, Montoya (2009), defined personal branding as "a clear, powerful, compelling public image" (p. 4). Personal brands also refer to "any well-known persona who is the subject of marketing communications efforts" (Thomson, 2006, p. 104). While this research does provide context to personal branding, results

are found primarily through secondary sources and not tested among certain groups such as athletes. Athletes across all levels of sport have the ability to market themselves through not only their personal brands, but also through their sport team/organization, endorsement and sponsorship deals, and sport agencies which are unique compared to the way other individuals can market their personal brand (Arai, Ko & Ross, 2014). Taken together, this study will build on the above research by analyzing the perceptions of personal branding among collegiate female athletes.

Sport marketing scholars have utilized personal branding theories such as brand identity theory, self-presentation theory, and social role theory and applied them to examine athlete brands (Lobpries, Bennett & Brison, 2018; Doyle, Su & Kunkel, 2020; Park, Williams & Son, 2020). Due to their well-known persona and professional management, athletes can serve as vehicles for advertisements and endorsements along with promoting their personality and skill as a brand (Arai et al., 2014; Thomson, 2006). An athlete's brand is defined as "a public persona of an athlete who has established their own symbolic meaning and value using their name, face, or other brand elements" (Arai et al., 2014, p. 98). This allows an athlete to not only utilize their playing-ability to brand themselves but also use their personality as well. Research implies that key factors in building an athlete's brand include not only their skill but also a strong professional image portrayed in mainstream media (Parmentier & Fischer, 2012). Research also discovered that many athletes are unaware of the value their personal brand could have and the potential long-term advantages such as endorsements, sponsorships, clothing deals, and public appearances from leveraging their brand equity throughout their athletic career (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2012). To help fill athlete's branding knowledge gap, sport marketing professionals and branding agencies step in to guide an athlete's brand in the modern digital media age through

the creation of models, development of branding strategies, and investigation of new branding avenues (Ballouli & Hutchinson, 2012). As athletes are given more opportunities to develop and market their brand, future research must observe these changes to better understand athlete branding efforts. Taken together, the research on branding led to the development of the research question guiding this study; what are the perceptions female student-athletes have regarding brand identity, personal branding, branding barriers, and name, image, and likeness (NIL) compensation?

Model of Athlete Brand Image (MABI)

The Model of Athlete Brand Image (MABI), developed by Arai, Ko, and Ross (2014) provides a framework to understand how athletes develop and leverage their brand image to enhance their overall brand equity. Brand image includes the consumer's perceptions and associations about a brand which are held in the consumer's memory (Arai, Ko, Kaplanidou, 2013). The dimensions of MABI include athletic performance, attractive appearance, and marketable lifestyle that resonates with consumers to produce a successful brand image (Arai et al., 2014). Athletic performance refers to an athlete's sport performance related features, attractive appearance is an athlete's attractive external appearance, and marketable lifestyle is and athlete's off-field marketable features (Arai et al., 2014). Athlete's such as David Beckham have provided evidence that an athlete is able to develop such a strong brand within sports that their brand equity extends to his personal life due to consumer interest which leads to endorsements outside of the sports market (Parmentier & Fischer, 2012). The research approach to the development of the MABI focused on findings from secondary sources. The significance of this model is that it provides an operational definition of an athlete brand and identifies the dimensions that are within an athlete's brand image. However, the MABI is limited in scope by

not considering differences, such as athlete gender, may impact their ability to market themselves. By utilizing the framework of the MABI, the current study will examine the specific population of female student-athletes and the effect the dimensions of athletic performance, attractive appearance, and marketable lifestyle have on the individual. This led to the development of the first research question:

RQ1: Do female collegiate athletes rely on their athletic performance, attractive appearance, and marketable lifestyle to develop their brand identity?

Student-Athlete Branding

Research has shown that student-athletes understand the importance of personal branding and the impact a strong personal brand can make during and long after their athletic careers (Brogan, 2015; Bender, 2020; Park, Williams, & Son, 2020). According to Brogan (2015), the student-athlete definition of a personal brand is: "displaying who you are and what you stand for to the world" (p.26). The student-athlete definition of a personal brand implies that athletic performance is not the only factor that dictates the strength of their brand (Brogan, 2015; Bender, 2020). Many student-athletes also look up to professional athlete's personal brands and look at them as role models and motivational figures (Brogan, 2015). A practical implication of Brogan's (2015) research was to create further conversation about female athlete's need for personal brands. This study will continue to examine female athlete branding at the collegiate level by posing the second research question:

RQ2: Do female collegiate athletes express different perceptions and opinions of branding?

Social media serves as vital tools for student-athlete branding due to their convenience and ability to share skills and achievements to anyone including potential employers (Bender,

2020; Park et al., 2020). Student-athletes use social media to display their identity as a college athlete and their personal identity outside of sports through the concepts of frontstage and backstage performances (Park et al., 2020). Frontstage performances focus on the professional image of being a student-athlete while backstage performances emphasize the more casual, authentic personality of the individual (Park et al., 2020). While most student-athletes use social media as a tool for branding, research has identified that lack of education on how to use social media as a branding tool is a major limitation for student-athletes (Brogan, 2015; Bender, 2020; Park et al., 2020). Even with a lack of education on how to use social media to strengthen a personal brand, student-athletes continue to use the platform to promote their image and potentially benefit from it in new ways (Grambeau, 2020; Van Horne, 2021). Drawing on insights from previous research, the current study will examine if the type of social media used and time spent on social media influence the importance of promoting an athletes brand through social media. To further investigate branding strategies among student-athletes, the current study developed the third research question:

RQ3: What strategies, if any, do female collegiate athletes use to raise, promote, and/or grow their personal brand?

As of July 1, 2021, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has adopted an interim name, image, and likeness (NIL) policy allowing all student-athletes across each of the three NCAA divisions to exercise their NIL rights (Hosick, 2021). Scholars have already begun to examine the effects of such policy changes and the perceptions student-athletes have on the impact of NIL compensation (Grambeau, 2020; Van Horne, 2021, Donne & Hunter, 2021). A common theme that has emerged is the need to educate student-athletes on the rules and regulations of the new NIL policy and how to promote their brand in the new environment

(Grambeau, 2020; Van Horne, 2021). Grambeau (2020) included a survey of 705 student-athletes to examine their perceptions of NIL compensation. The survey concluded that there was significant support from student-athletes for compensation for NIL, but male athletes in both revenue and non-revenue sports supported NIL compensation significantly more than female athletes (Grambeau, 2020). Grambeau's study was one of the first to explore the perspectives on NIL of current NCAA student-athletes at one Division I Power 5 conference and suggests that further investigation on the topic would be a strong contribution (Grambeau, 2020). A key limitation in the research, however, was the absence of a Likert scale to the survey questions to compare on a scale how student-athletes actually felt. This study will further investigate the perceptions on NIL compensation of student-athletes by providing similar survey questions but structured with a Likert scale to compare results. This led to the development of the fourth research question:

RQ4: Do female collegiate athletes express different perceptions and opinions about recent NIL policy changes?

Gender and Athlete Branding

The concept of gender is built off socially constructed norms and stereotypes that are reinforced in multiple areas including sport (Lorber, 1994; Kane, 1995; Messner, 2000). Eagly (1987) offered a theory which explained the expectations and behavioral tendencies believed to be desirable for each sex. Social Role Theory (SRT) includes two types of expectations: descriptive norms which are synonymous with stereotypes, and injunctive norms which include consensual expectations on what a group of people should or ideally would do (Eagly, 2002). Due to economic, ecological, social, and technological pressures, both women and men have been assigned specific labor tasks based off their physical attributes (Harrison & Lynch, 2005).

Historically, men were given tasks that required strength, speed, and the ability to work away from home while women were responsible for childbearing and likely to fulfill task closely related to home and family (Harrison & Lynch, 2005). Due to the perceived communal qualities associated with women, it became difficult for women to enter the more masculine dominant roles including managerial and leadership positions (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Athlete branding scholars have implemented SRT in their research to identify specific barriers caused by gender roles (Moss-Racusin & Rudman, 2010; Parmentier & Fischer, 2012; Lobpries, Bennett, Brison, 2018). As gender roles continue to be prevalent in sport, research should consider these various barriers and their impact on female athletes.

Research shows that female athlete's physical attributes, such as attractiveness, are especially criticized in any type of sport they play (Lorber, 1994; Messner, 2000; Hextrum, 2020; Cooky et al., 2021). In the early 20th century when women's sports began to gain popularity, female athletes were forced to emphasize their feminine attractiveness to make it clear that they were different from their male counterparts (Cahn, 1993; Kane, 1995). Female athletes would have pageants during sporting events, dress codes, and rules of conduct which limited their ability to perform the way the athletes wanted (Cahn, 1993). As women's sports transitioned into the later 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, changes were made to the way they were portrayed, but not all of them were beneficial to the athletes. Media coverage became an issue for allowing female athletes to be seen by a much larger audience (Cooky et al., 2021). Early media portrayals of female athletes depicted them in either overtly sexual, racist frames or labeled as deviant, homosexual mutants who did not comply with gender norms in a congested ideological terrain (Cooky, Wachs, Messner, & Dworkin, 2010; Cooky et al., 2021). Other portrayals emphasized the "motherhood" lifestyle in the way female athletes

were branded (Cooky et al., 2021). Female athletes were looked upon with motherly traits such as being nurturing, caring, and gentle in sport. These stigmas against female athletes forced them to comply with the way people expect them to look, act, speak, and perform in their sport (Hextrum, 2020). Some athletes such as Serena Williams embrace such stereotypes and use that to promote their brand. While this strategy has worked for few female athletes, many are left to comply with societal norms to continue pursuing a career in sports. As female athlete attractiveness continues to be defined by others, future research should investigate not only how female athletes feel they are portrayed, but how they want to be portrayed as well.

Female Athlete Branding Barriers

Lobpries (2014) explored the brand identity creation process of female athletes and potential barriers female athletes may face when building their brand. After conducting interviews with professional female athletes and their agents, Lobpries concluded that barriers such as being too bold and assertive or limited in visibility in their sport do exist for female athletes who are building their brand (Lobpries, 2014). Lobpries et al. (2018) continued earlier research on female athlete branding to identify two central categories of branding barriers female athlete's encounter: expected social roles and leveraging personal brand equity. The expected social roles category includes female athletes who exhibit stereotyped masculine roles and are not considered attractive struggle to develop a strong brand (Lobpries et al., 2018). The leveraging personal brand equity category identifies female athletes must do more than perform well in their sport due to limited visibility and lack of proper training to develop their brand (Lobpries et al., 2018). Within these two categories are five emergent themes which represent brand building strategies necessary for a female athlete to build and leverage their personal brand

(Lobpries et al., 2018): being bold and assertive, assumption physical attractiveness matters, performance and something else, invisible and limiting, proper brand management.

The first category, expected social roles, included the themes of being bold and assertive and assumption physical attractiveness matters. Being bold and assertive includes female athletes who exhibit agentic traits, which are behaviors or actions that reflect traditionally valued characteristics, struggle to brand themselves by having to comply with what is expected from them (Lobpries et al., 2018). While men are socialized to be expressive and aggressive, women commonly receive backlash and criticism for expressing socially constructed masculine traits (Messner, 2000; Moss-Racusin & Rudman, 2010). Female athletes who do not express their gender role stereotypes are subject to regendering, being labeled a deviant mutant, or even erased from any form of recognition (Kane, 1995). These issues are apparent in situations such as the sex test instituted by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and women participating in men's sports such as Ila Borders who pitched for Southern California College baseball team (Kane, 1995). The second theme, assumption physical attractiveness matters, refers to female athletes needing to be feminine and attractive are important prerequisites to developing their brand (Lobpries et al., 2018). Depending on the sport, research implies that while some female athletes justify the notion that "sex sells" in sports, other female athletes prefer viewing female athlete's athletic competence (Fink, Kane, & LaVoi, 2014; Kane, LaVoi, & Fink, 2013).

The second category, leveraging personal brand equity, included the three themes of performance and something else, invisible and limiting, and proper brand management. Performance and something else establish that women must do more than perform well in their sport to build a brand (Lobpries et al., 2018). Success in women's sports is often attributed to luck or emotion while success in women's sports is attributed to skill and hard work making it

more difficult for female athletes to gain recognition in their sport (Fink, 2015). The theme of invisible and limiting identifies women's sports has limited visibility (Lobpries et al., 2018). At both the college and professional level, the men's "big three" sports; basketball, baseball, and football, occupy more than 70% of airtime in sports coverage which leaves little to no availability for women's sports to be represented (Fink, 1998; Cooky, Council, Mears, & Messner, 2021). The third and final theme, proper brand management, explains that women may not be trained to manage their brands and must look to others for assistance (Lobpries et al., 2018). Due to the lack of media exposure, female athletes are used less frequently for sponsorships and endorsements which leaves these women to represent their brand by themselves and with little guidance from a manager or agent (Shaw & Amis, 2001; Parker, Mudrick, & Fink, 2018).

The current study suggests that each of five branding barrier themes identified by elite female athletes can also be represented among female athletes at the collegiate level. Potentially new findings could be discovered by utilizing branding barriers established by professional female athletes and applying them to collegiate female athletes and open new avenues for potential research on collegiate athlete branding. Considering the suggestions for future research, this study developed the fifth research question:

RQ5: To what extent will perceptions of branding barriers by female collegiate athlete's mirror branding barriers identified by professional female athletes?

Theoretical Framework

This study utilizes Brand Identity Theory to examine how female collegiate athletes define and utilize their brand identity over time. Brand identity is defined as a brand's unique set of associations that not only resonate with consumers but differentiate the brand from

competitors and deliver brand performance over time (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000). A brand identity is structured with a core identity of attributes that remain constant over time and an extended identity which focuses on brand personality, relationship, and strong symbol association (Ghodeswar, 2008). Separate from brand image, which is what consumers perceive, brand identity is controlled by the owner of that brand (de Chernatony, 1999). Researchers such as de Chernatony (1999) argued that branding research should utilize brand identity theory to examine brand building processes.

Branding literature also suggests that the most crucial step in the brand building process is to first create a brand identity (Aaker, 1996). Kapferer (1997) developed a hexagonal model made up of two categories, internal and external, and six components that comprise brand identity. The internal category consists of the physique, relationship, and reflection of the brand that is the overall look, loyalty, and connection between the brand and its consumer (Kapferer, 1997). The external category consists of the personality, culture, and self-image of the brand that communicates the values and foundation of the way a brand is seen (Kapferer, 1997). Another model developed by de Chernatony (1999) shared similarities to Kapferer's model, but emphasized that a brand's vision, a well-defined direction for the brand, and culture, the core and peripheral values of a brand, are essential to connecting with consumers (de Chernatony, 1999). These models follow the definition of brand identity, which is to resonate with consumers and separate from competitors. Ghodeswar's (2008) Positioning, Communicating, Delivering, and Leveraging (PCDL) model for building brand identity focused on four elements essential for creating a brand identity: positioning the brand, communicating the brand message, delivering the brand performance, and leveraging brand equity.

The first element of the PCDL model is positioning the brand in a consumer's mind to differentiate, or stand apart, from other competing brands (Ghodeswar, 2008). After a brand is positioned in a consumer's mind, the next element is to communicate the brand message to the target audience (Ghodeswar, 2008). Continuously communicating the brand's value and other identity dimensions is necessary to establishing a long-term commitment between an individual's brand and their consumers. Once a brand's identity is properly positioned and the message is communicated, the next element is to deliver the brand performance by measuring how the brand can effectively differentiate itself from competitors (Ghodeswar, 2008). A strong brand performance can establish trust within a target audience which creates an attachment or form of loyalty to a specific brand (Ghodeswar, 2008). The final element is leveraging brand equity, which is when additional associations are linked to the brand to help generate brand equity (Ghodeswar, 2008). Brand equity is any added value to a brand (Aaker, 1996).

Lobpries (2014) successfully used brand identity theory and the PCDL model to identify the brand identity creation of two elite female athletes. Lobpries concluded that while potential barriers do exist, female athletes can take steps such as being a good networker and using opportunities like speaking engagements and sponsorships during their sport career to create a strong brand (Lobpries, 2014). This research is important to this study because it reinforces the use of brand identity theory and brand identity models as an essential tool for exploring brand identity creation and development for female athletes. Brand identity theory can then validate the practicality of this study as it aims to research real world branding practices among female collegiate athletes.

Summary/Research Questions

Most research on personal branding and brand identity is conducted with male subjects which fails to consider branding barriers that are perceived by female athletes (Lobpries, Bennett, Brison, 2018). Multiple professional athletes were examined in the Lobpries et al. (2018) study, which found that perceived brand building barriers such as being too bold and assertive, having limited visibility, and lacking proper brand management exist in the creating their brand. As it proved to be beneficial to examine branding barriers among professional female athletes, the same effects should be questioned regarding female collegiate athletes as well. With little research on the topic of personal branding and brand identity among collegiate female athletes, the following research questions can be asked:

- *RQ1:* Do female collegiate athletes rely on their athletic performance, attractive appearance, and marketable lifestyle to develop their brand identity?

- *RQ2:* Do female collegiate athletes express different perceptions and opinions of branding?

- *RQ3:* What strategies, if any, do female collegiate athletes use to raise, promote, and/or grow their personal brand?

- *RQ4:* Do female collegiate athletes express different perceptions and opinions about recent NIL policy changes?

- *RQ5:* To what extent will perceptions of branding barriers by female collegiate athlete's mirror branding barriers identified by professional female athletes?

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Overview of Research Method

This quantitative research study explored brand identity strategies and potential branding barriers among female collegiate athletes. The study aimed to fill the research gap in female athlete branding while exploring new opportunities student-athletes can access through their individual name, image, and likeness (NIL). Due to the exploratory nature of this study, quantitative, descriptive, data was gathered to generalize the phenomena of athlete branding among female student-athletes. An online survey was conducted to further investigate female collegiate athlete's perceptions and opinions of branding and brand concepts, potential strategies to promote their brand, perceptions and opinions of NIL policies, and potential barriers in the brand building process. There are two major types of survey research: descriptive surveys which attempt to describe a current condition or attitude of a population, and analytical surveys which attempt to describe why situations exist withing a population (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011).

This study utilized descriptive survey research methods to describe current conditions and attitudes toward female athlete's perceptions of brand identity, branding barriers, and current NIL policies without any intervention from the researcher. While being cost-effective and not restricted by geographical boundaries, survey research proves to be useful in investigating problems in realistic settings (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). A large amount of data can be collected through survey research, another advantage is that data from previous research can be archived to aid in questionnaire development (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011).

Participants

The population of interest for this study were Division I NCAA female student-athletes. Members of the target population were all female, ranged from freshman to graduate students (ages 18-24), were comprised of a diverse group of race/ethnicity, and spanned across 13 sports. Participants were academically eligible to participate in their sport. Participants were selected utilizing convenience sampling to gather a large enough sample to explore brand identity strategies and perceptions of branding barriers among female athletes. Participants volunteered to take part in the survey. Potential risks included volunteer bias which includes participants who could have an opinion which differs from others who do not participate. A total of 131 participants participated in the survey to reach an acceptable response level.

Athletic department staff such as sport information directors (SIDs), communications staff, administrative staff, sport director of operations, and other employees from Division I athletic programs were contacted to distribute the informed consent document and survey to female athletes. The informed consent document stated the purpose of the study, potential risks and benefits for participation, and statements on the confidentiality and data security of the research. This method of distribution aided in keeping results confidential to the respondents. Only de-identified data (not including names, birthdates, addresses, etc.) was seen by the primary researcher and the thesis committee.

Study Design

The survey consisted of three major sections: informed consent, primary survey items, and demographic questions. Beginning with informed consent, participants read a consent document then be prompted to answer "yes" or "no" on whether they agree to participate in the study. Participants who answered "yes" in the informed consent section were directed to answer 42 survey items throughout five sub-sections. Each sub-section contained survey items that

related to each research question and vary from multiple choice, 5-point Likert scale, and sliding scale options. Seven demographics questions comprised the final section of the survey asking the participant's age, gender, race/ethnicity, political affiliation, academic year, sport played, and university/college they attend. These demographic questions were selected to potentially identify and differences between them. Academic year, political affiliation, and team or individual sport (sport played) were all variables that were considered to have an impact on participant's responses. The survey was distributed from March, 2022 to May, 2022. The survey was created on an online format to be distributed via URL and QR code for easier accessibility.

Operationalization of Variables

Independent Variables

- ***Team or Individual Sport.*** 13 different women's sports were recorded from survey responses. These sports were then divided into two separate categories of "Team" and "Individual" sports.

    Team sports were defined as any competition that emphasized cooperation with other players to work as a collective team to compete in their specific sport. For this study, team sports included basketball, rowing, soccer, softball, and volleyball.

    Individual sports were identified as any competition where only one athlete competes by themselves to participate in their specific sport. For this study, individual sports included cross country, golf, gymnastics, tennis, track and field, swim and dive, fencing, and equestrian. While some of the individual sports such as tennis, gymnastics, and track and field have team elements such as team score, the sports rely on athletes competing by themselves to earn points in their competition. Since a collection of athletes

are not working together to achieve a goal, these sports were identified as individual sports.

- *Political Affiliation.* Political affiliation of Republican, Democrat, Independent, or no affiliation were identified in the survey. Differences in political affiliation showed how specific groups may differ in opinion of recent branding and NIL changes.

- *Academic Year.* Student-athletes also vary in age and eligibility based on their current year in school. Differences in age or time participating in sport showed how changes in time might affect the opinions of branding and NIL policy.

Dependent Variables

- *Brand Identity.* This variable is defined as the direction, purpose, and meaning of a brand (Aaker, 1997). Participants were asked how strongly they agree or disagree with the definition of brand identity.

- *Personal Branding.* The definition of personal branding is taken from Brogan (2015) which included the student-athlete definition of a personal brand as: "Displaying who you are and what you stand for to the world" (p.26). Participants were asked how strongly they agree or disagree with the definition of personal branding.

- *Branding Barriers.* The branding barriers items were taken from Lobpries, Bennett, & Brison (2018). The items include two central categories which included five broad themes: 1) Expected Social Roles (being bold and assertive and assumption physical attractiveness matters), 2) Leveraging Personal Brand Equity (performance and something else, invisible and limiting, and proper brand management). All themes were measured on a five-point scale (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree)

for participants to determine whether any of the perceived barriers would be a factor that limits a female athlete's ability to define themselves in sport (Lobpries et al., 2018).

- *Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) Policies.* NIL is an activity that involves the use of an individual's name, image, and likeness for commercial or promotional use (NCAA, 2021). Four of the questions regarding student-athlete perceptions of NIL compensation were taken from a previous survey distributed to 1,200 student-athletes (Grambeau, 2020). The questions replicated in the study were: 1) In general, do you support student-athletes having the opportunity to be compensated for commercial use of their Name, Image, and Likeness? 3) Universities should allow individual endorsements for student-athletes. 7) The option of endorsement/sponsorship opportunities would impact your decision on where to attend school. 9) NIL would create a divide among different teams at a school.

Procedure

Data was collected during the months of March through May of 2022. Prior to answering any survey questions, an online informed consent section was completed. The survey was only able to be accessed through a URL or QR code sent via email or survey flyer and was brief to aid in completion rates. Multiple emails were sent to athletics staff asking for increased participation if needed to increase response rates.

Participants answered the questions in sections which include groups of questions related to brand identity, branding barriers, and NIL policy. Survey questions will be given in the format of a five-point Likert scale (1=completely disagree and 5=completely agree) and multiple choice. Examples of these items include social media is a key tool for athlete branding, Student-athletes are provided proper education and resources on how to utilize social media as a branding tool,

Universities should allow individual endorsements for student-athletes (see Appendix for complete list of questionnaire items). Demographic questions (age, gender, academic year, type of sport played, education level, and race) were asked at the end of the survey followed by a thank you message for their participation. After a desirable response rate had been reached, all research questions were analyzed.

Materials: Questionnaire

The questionnaire was comprised of multiple sources regarding brand identity (Aaker, 1996; Ghodeswar, 2008), personal branding (Brogan, 2015; Arai et al. 2014; Doyle et al., 2020), perceived branding barriers (Lobpries et al., 2018), and perceptions/attitudes of endorsement and sponsorship opportunities through and individual's NIL (Grambeau, 2020). The questionnaire was designed to measure perceptions of branding strategies, branding barriers, and NIL opportunities among female student-athletes. A total of 49 items were included in the questionnaire which will be administered via online survey sent through email. To address the research questions of the study, 42 of the 49 survey items were divided into five sub-sections related to each research question:

RQ1: Do female collegiate athletes rely on their athletic performance, attractive appearance, and marketable lifestyle to develop their brand identity?

- Section 1: Three 5-point Likert scale items.
    1. An athlete's sport performance is necessary to build a successful brand.
    2. An athlete's attractive external appearance is necessary to build a successful brand.
    3. An athlete's off-field marketable features are necessary to build a successful brand.

RQ2: Do female collegiate athletes express different perceptions and opinions of branding?

- Section 2: Two 5-point Likert scale items.

    1. Brand identity is the direction, purpose, and meaning of a brand.

    2. Personal branding is displaying who you are and what you stand for to the world.

RQ3: What strategies, if any, do female collegiate athletes use to raise, promote, and/or grow

their personal brand?

- Section 3: Four multiple-choice questions and two 5-point Likert scale items.

    1. What social media platforms do you use?

    2. How much time, on average, do you spend on social media?

    3. Are you a consumer of sports media?

    4. Do you follow other professional and/or collegiate athletes on social media?

    5. Social media is a key tool for athlete branding.

    6. The type of content an athlete posts on social media can impact their brand.

RQ4: Do female collegiate athletes express different perceptions and opinions about recent NIL

policy changes?

- Section 4: Seven 5-point Likert scale items and one sliding scale question.

    1. Student-athletes should have the opportunity to be compensated for commercial

       use of their name, image, and likeness (NIL).

    2. Universities should allow individual endorsements/sponsorships for student-

       athletes.

    3. My university provides equal opportunities for all athletes to benefit from their

       name, image, and likeness (NIL).

4. Athletes who are obtaining name, image, and likeness (NIL) benefits tend to receive more media attention.

5. The option of endorsement/sponsorship opportunities would impact a student-athlete's decision on where to attend school.

6. Name, Image, and likeness (NIL) would create a divide among different sports teams at a school.

7. My university provides student-athletes proper education and resources on how to benefit from their name, image, and likeness (NIL).

8. Out of the following, which attributes (athletic performance, physical attractiveness, marketable lifestyle outside of sports, media attention) would aid in student-athlete's benefiting from their name, image, and likeness (NIL).

Following data entry and recoding, the 7 NIL policy items were factor analyzed using principal components method with Varimax rotation. The factor analysis produced one factor with qualifying eigenvalues (over 1.0). Factor loadings of 0.50 were considered significant ($p<0.05$). Items that either did not load or loaded similarly on two or more factors were dropped.

A reliability analysis was conducted on the factor (i.e., "NIL Approval") which accounted for 20.85 percent of the variance and consisted of two items: NIL compensation and NIL allowed in universities (Chronbach's Alpha = 0.95). The table below shows the factor loadings based on the survey items for research question 4.

Table 1.
RQ 4 Factor Analysis Table

	NIL Approval
NIL Compensation	0.94
NIL Allowed in Universities	0.94
Eigenvalues	2.29

% of variance	20.85

RQ5: To what extent will perceptions of branding barriers by female collegiate athlete's mirror branding barriers identified by professional female athletes?

- Twenty-three 5-point Likert scale items.

  1. Female athletes who exhibit masculine traits struggle to brand themselves.

  2. Being feminine and physically attractive are important prerequisites to branding female athletes.

  3. College athletes can be both aggressive and nurturing regardless of sex.

  4. We should stop thinking about whether student-athletes are male or female and focus on other characteristics.

  5. Women's sports should be treated differently than men's sports.

  6. Only some types of sports are appropriate for both male and female athletes.

  7. Women must do more than perform well in their sport to build a successful brand.

  8. Female athletes are sexualized more than male athletes.

  9. I feel like I am expected to pose a certain way as a female athlete.

  10. I feel like I am expected to act a certain way as a female athlete.

  11. I feel like I am supposed to perform a certain way as a female athlete.

  12. I feel like I am supposed to look a certain way as a female athlete.

  13. Women's sports have limited visibility.

  14. The way female athletes are portrayed in the media is inaccurate and hurts out image.

  15. I feel like I must accept the way I am portrayed in the media to get any exposure.

  16. The NCAA provides equal opportunity for all athletes to promote their image.

17. My university provides equal opportunity for all athletes to promote their image.

18. Female athletes are not trained to manage their personal brands and must look to others for assistance.

19. The NCAA provides adequate resources and assistance in brand management.

20. My university provides adequate resources and assistance in brand management.

21. The NCAA allows me to portray myself the way I want and allows me to say no to being portrayed in a false, sexual image.

22. The media allows me to portray myself the way I want and allows me to say no to being portrayed in a false, sexual image.

23. My university allows me to portray myself the way I want and allows me to say no to being portrayed in a false, sexual image.

Following data entry and recoding, the 23 branding barrier items were factor analyzed using principal components method with Varimax rotation. The factor analysis produced four factors with qualifying eigenvalues (over 1.0). Factor loadings of 0.50 were considered significant ($p<0.05$). Items that either did not load or loaded similarly on two or more factors were dropped.

A reliability analysis was conducted on the first factor (i.e. "Portrayal and Feelings") which accounted for 28.76 percent of the variance and consisted of six items: pose a certain way, act a certain way, perform a certain way, look a certain way, media portrayal hurts image, and accepting media portrayal (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.90). The second factor, (i.e. "Brand Support"), accounted for 11.14 percent of the variance and consisted of four items: NCAA promoting image, university promoting image, NCAA brand management, and university brand management (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.81). The third factor, (i.e. "Image Barrier"), accounted for

allowing my image, and media allowing my image (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.81). Finally, the

fourth factor, (i.e. Brand Traits), which accounted for 7.41 percent of the variance and consisted

of 3 items: masculine traits, feminine and attractive, and more than just performance

(Chronbach's Alpha = 0.71). The table below shows all four factor loadings based on the survey

items for research question 5. 9.21 percent of the variance and consisted of three items: NCAA

allowing my image, university allowing my image, and media allowing my image (Cronbach's

Alpha = 0.81). Finally, the fourth factor, (i.e. Brand Traits), which accounted for 7.41 percent of

the variance and consisted of 3 items: masculine traits, feminine and attractive, and more than

just performance (Chronbach's Alpha = 0.71).

Table 2.
RQ 5 Factor Analysis Table

	Portrayal and Feelings	Brand Support	Image Barrier	Brand Traits
Pose a Certain Way	0.89			
Act a Certain Way	0.92			
Perform a Certain Way	0.91			
Look a Certain Way	0.79			
Media Portrayal Hurts Image	0.51			
Accepting Media Portrayal	0.51			
NCAA Promoting Image		0.73		
University Promoting Image		0.84		
NCAA Brand Management		0.71		
University Brand Management		0.69		
NCAA Allowing My Image			0.81	
University Allowing My Image			0.75	
Media Allowing My Image			0.81	
Masculine Traits				0.75

Feminine and Attractive				0.79
More than Just Performance				0.72
Eigenvalues	6.61	2.56	2.11	1.70
% of variance	28.76	11.14	9.21	7.41

Statistical Analysis

Once the quantitative data was collected from all completed surveys it was entered into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software (SPSS Statistics). One-way MANOVA tests were used to determine if any significant differences are apparent between the independent variables of type of sport and time participating in sport and the dependent variables of brand identity, personal branding, branding barriers, and NIL policies.

Potential Limitations

A disadvantage to survey research is the absence of observation from the researcher to ask follow-up questions or observe any types of behaviors the subject may express while participating in the survey (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). Other research methods such as semi-structured interviews and experiments allow to the researcher to observe and interact with participants in ways that survey research cannot. Any inappropriate wording of questions or selection of respondents may also lead to issues in survey research (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011). Limitations to this specific study included were encountered as well. A low number of responses from individual institutions made it difficult to generalize the results to a much larger population. A lack of open-ended questions also limits the study's ability to provide the "why" behind many of the responses. Future studies should include more open-ended questions or use mixed-methods research to provide a detailed qualitative approach. Future research should consider conducting the study over a longer period as well. This study was conducted only over a

few months, not allowing more responses to be obtained or examine any changes of opinions or

perceptions over time.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Demographics

A total of 131 female student-athletes participated in the study. Responses were received from seven institutions across five states. All grade levels were represented from freshman to graduate students (n=90). The largest single group self-identified as juniors (n=28, 31.1%), followed by seniors (n=20, 22.2%), then freshman (n=19, 21.2%), sophomores (n=16, 17.8%), and finally graduate students (n=7, 7.8%). A total of 13 different sports were represented in the sample (n=84). The largest sports self-identified were rowing (n=29, 34.5%), swim and dive (n=11, 13.1%), track and field (n=10, 8.4%), and basketball (n=7, 8.3%). The remaining nine sports included cross country, golf, gymnastics, soccer, softball, volleyball, tennis, fencing, and equestrian. Due to lower response rates on certain sports, data will not be available to eliminate deductive re-identification. Participants were also asked their political affiliation (n=87) which included democrat (n=30, 32.9%), republican (n=31, 32.9%), independent (n=9, 10.3%), and no affiliation (n= 17, 19.5%).

Developing female student-athlete brands

Research question 1 asked whether there were differences between the importance of athletic performance, attractive appearance, and marketable lifestyle in developing a successful brand among female student-athletes. One-way MANOVA was conducted to determine whether there is a difference between female student-athletes of different academic year, political affiliation, or participating in a team or individual sport on the importance of athletic performance, attractive appearance, and marketable lifestyle in branding. Using Pillai's Trace,

the combined DVs were not significantly different by academic year (Pillai's Trace=0.07, $F(15,219)=0.36$, $p=0.99$, partial eta squared=0.02), political affiliation (Pillai's Trace=0.05, $F(9,219)=0.39$, $p=0.94$, partial eta squared=0.02), or team or individual sport (Pillai's Trace=0.10, $F(3,74)=0.25$, $p=0.486$ partial eta squared=0.01). The result of no significance determines that there was a collective understanding between the impact of athletic performance, attractive appearance, and marketable lifestyle on an athlete's brand. Differences between the factors, however, may show differences in the importance student-athletes hold for each one. Results from the MANOVA tests are represented in Table 1.

The total means for athletic performance ($M=4.10$, $SD=0.83$) and marketable lifestyle ($M=4.22$, $SD=0.73$) remained similar while the total mean for attractive appearance ($M=3.59$, $SD=1.15$) was lower. Though there were no significant differences for academic year, political affiliation, or sport played, it was interesting to observe that overall, participants were more positive for athletic performance (57.76% somewhat agree, 31.90% agree) and marketable lifestyle (54.31% somewhat agree, 33.62% agree) than they were for attractive appearance (45.69 somewhat agree, 18.10 agree). This suggests that the external physical attractiveness of female student-athletes would be less important to developing their brand than the way they play and market themselves outside of sports. All survey item means, and standard deviations can be found in the Appendixes under Table of Means.

Table 3.
RQ 1 MANOVA- Female Student-Athlete Perceptions of Athletic Performance, Attractive Appearance, and Marketable Lifestyle

	Pillai's Trace	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial eta squared
Academic Year	0.07	0.36	15.00	219.00	0.99	0.02
Political Affiliation	0.05	0.39	9.00	219.00	0.94	0.02

Team or Individual Sport	0.10	0.25	3.00	74.00	0.86	0.01

Opinions of female student-athlete branding

Research question 2 asked if female student-athletes had different perceptions and opinions on branding. One-way MANOVA was conducted to identify any significant differences between female student-athletes of different academic year, political affiliation, or sport played and the degree to which they agree or disagree with the definitions of personal branding and brand identity. Using Pillai's Trace, the combined DVs were not significantly different by academic year (Pillai's Trace=0.09, $F(10,146)=0.70$, $p=0.72$, partial eta squared=0.05), political affiliation (Pillai's Trace=0.01, $F(6,146)=0.15$, $p=0.99$, partial eta squared=0.06), and team or individual sport (Pillai's Trace=0.02, $F(2,75)=1.19$, $p=0.42$ partial eta squared=0.02). Results from the MANOVA test are represented in Table 2. The lack of significance shows that respondents had no significant differences in their definitions of personal branding and brand identity.

The total means for brand identity definition ($M=4.23$, $SD=0.82$) and personal branding definition ($M=4.63$, $SD=0.69$) were both similar to agreeing with the two definitions. Participants answered positively to the brand identity definition (35.29% somewhat agree, 44.12% agree) and personal branding definition (19.61% somewhat agree, 73.53% agree). This result provides a baseline understanding of how student-athletes may define personal branding and brand identity. Since the definitions were brief and not specific to individual athletes, future research could use the results to compare them to individual definitions of personal branding and brand identity from student-athletes.

Table 4.
RQ 2 MANOVA- Opinions on Branding Definitions

	Pillai's Trace	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial eta squared
Academic Year	0.09	0.70	10.00	146.00	0.72	0.05
Political Affiliation	0.01	0.15	6.00	146.00	0.99	0.06
Team or Individual Sport	0.02	0.88	2.00	75.00	0.42	0.02

Strategies to female student-athlete branding

Research question 3 investigated if female student-athletes utilize any type of strategy to raise, promote, or grow their brand. The survey focused on how student-athletes used social media to promote their brand and focusing on how student-athletes perceive the importance of social media use and what content they post to promote their brand. 102 survey participants agreed to using some form of social media across 12 different platforms with the most popular being Instagram (20.65%) and Snapchat (19.63%). When asked how much time participants spend on social media per day, most responded between 1-2 hours (40.20%) or 3-5 hours (42.16%). The majority, (85.29%) of participants also agreed that they consume some form of sports media. Most participants (96.08%) also agreed that they follow professional and/or collegiate athletes on social media as well. With so much information being consumed on social media, including sports media, this study examined the importance of social media to developing a student-athlete's brand.

One-way MANOVA was conducted to identify any significant differences between female student-athletes of different academic year, political affiliation, or sport played and their opinions on the importance of utilizing social media as a branding tool and that the content they post on social media can impact their brand. Using Pillai's Trace, the combined DVs were not significantly different by academic year (Pillai's Trace=0.08, $F(10,146)=0.59$, $p=0.82$, partial eta

squared=0.04), political affiliation (Pillai's Trace=0.10, $F_{(6,146)}=1.27$, $p=0.28$, partial eta

squared=0.05), and team or individual sport (Pillai's Trace=0.05, $F_{(2,75)}=1.85$, $p=0.16$, partial

eta squared=0.05). As the opportunities for student-athletes to utilize social media to grow and

benefit from their personal brand, the importance of what content an athlete posts and their

perception of how it impacts their brand should be considered in future studies. Social media

serves as a key branding tool for female student-athletes (26.47% somewhat agree, 68.63%

agree). As women's collegiate sports receive less visibility by the mainstream media, they rely

on their personal social media more than others to promote their brands.

Table 5.
RQ 3 MANOVA- Social Media and Branding

	Pillai's Trace	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial eta squared
Academic Year	0.08	0.59	10.00	146.00	0.82	0.04
Political Affiliation	0.10	1.27	6.00	146.00	0.28	0.05
Team or Individual Sport	0.05	1.85	2.00	75.00	0.16	0.05

Perceptions of Name, Image, Likeness (NIL) policy among female student-athletes

Research question 4 examined female student-athlete opinions about name, image, and

likeness (NIL) compensation and policies. One-way MANOVA was conducted to identify any

significant differences between female student-athletes of different academic year, political

affiliation, or sport played and six combined survey items regarding the research question. There

was no statistical significance for the combined DVs by academic year (Pillai's Trace= 0.29, F

$(30,355) =0.79$, $p=0.84$, partial eta squared=0.06) or political affiliation (Pillai's Trace= 0.16, F

$(18,207) =0.67$, $p=0.84$, partial eta squared=0.06).

However, there was statistical significance at the $p=<0.05$ level for team or individual sport (Pillai's Trace= 0.17, F (6,70) =2.44, $p=0.03$, partial eta squared=0.17). The two variables found to be significant at the $p=<0.05$ level among team or individual sports was NIL being allowed in respondent's specific universities ($F=7.69$, $p=0.01$) and NIL would create divides among other sports and student-athletes ($F=4.69$, $p=0.03$). This suggests that while student-athletes support having NIL opportunities at their institution, they also agree that NIL opportunities would create divides among different sports. The significant difference between team or individual sport offers some interesting insight to recent NIL changes. As more attention and opportunities are provided to certain sports at a university, this may cause issues between the remaining sports. This is already seen with athletic programs providing more resources to revenue generating sports such as football and men's basketball while non-revenue generating sports, including most if not all female sports receive fewer resources. It is being seen with NIL opportunities as well as college football donors are creating funds for their athletes will all other sports receive little to no compensation from donors the same way.

Table 6.
RQ 4 MANOVA- Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) Perceptions

	Pillai's Trace	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial eta squared
Academic Year	0.29	0.74	30.00	355.00	0.84	0.06
Political Affiliation	0.16	0.67	18.00	207.00	0.84	0.06
Team or Individual Sport	0.17	2.44	6.00	70.00	0.03	0.17
NIL Allowed in My University		7.69			0.01	0.09
NIL Creates Divides		4.69			0.03	0.06

An additional four variables were included to this section to include female student-athlete opinions of athletic performance, attractive appearance, marketable lifestyle, and media

attention. These survey items were distributed via a ten-point sliding scale to account for any increased variance between the variables. One-way MANOVA was conducted to identify any significant differences between female student-athletes of different academic year, political affiliation, or sport played and the combined four variables. There was no statistical significance for the combined DVs by academic year (Pillai's Trace= 0.18, F (20,280) =0.67, p=0.85, partial eta squared=0.05) or political affiliation (Pillai's Trace= 0.09, F (12,207) =0.55, p=0.89, partial eta squared=0.03).

However, statistical significance was found at the p=<0.05 level for team or individual sport (Pillai's Trace= 0.15, F (4,70) =3.14, p=0.02, partial eta squared=0.15). There was a significant difference between the two items that an athlete must have a positive marketable lifestyle to benefit from NIL (F=4.47, p=0.04) and that increased media attention would lead to increased NIL opportunities (F=5.51, p=0.02). This reflects female student-athlete opinions that women's sports receive less visibility through mainstream media and require more effort to promote their brand for NIL opportunities. Certain sports at universities that receive increased media attention leaves other sports behind on being able to market their sport and individual athletes.

Table 6-1.
RQ 4 MANOVA- Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) Perceptions on 10-point scale

	Pillai's Trace	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial eta squared
Academic Year	0.18	0.67	20.00	280.00	0.85	0.05
Political Affiliation	0.09	0.55	12.00	207.00	0.89	0.03
Team or Individual Sport	0.15	3.14	4.00	70.00	0.02	0.15
NIL Marketable Lifestyle		4.47			0.04	0.06

NIL Media Attention	5.51	0.02	0.07

Perceptions of branding barriers among female student-athletes

Research question 5 investigated if any similarities of branding barriers identified by professional female athletes would be mirrored by female student-athletes. One-way MANOVA was conducted to identify any significant differences between female student-athletes of different academic year, political affiliation, or sport played and the 15 variables regarding the research question. There was no statistical significance for the combined variables by academic year (Pillai's Trace= 0.91, F (55,325) =1.31, p=0.08, partial eta squared=0.18), political affiliation (Pillai's Trace= 0.57, F (33,192) =1.35, p=0.11, partial eta squared=0.19) and team or individual sport (Pillai's Trace= 0.14, F (11,64) =0.94, p=0.51, partial eta squared=0.14).

However, there was significance for the factor of brand support based on academic year (F=2.38, p=0.05) and team or individual sport (F=4.91, p=0.03). Differences in age and type of sport played could impact a student-athlete's perception on how they feel supported in promoting and managing their personal brand. With branding opportunities in a state of constant change, younger student-athletes are introduced to many new opportunities that older student-athletes are not. This is the same for type of sport played as some sports receive less support than others based on factors such as revenue and popularity.

The largest amount of significance for this study was found between participants political affiliation and their perceptions of female athlete branding barriers. Female student-athletes' attitudes towards their portrayal and feelings of branding barriers were significant (F=4.37, p=0.01). Brand support was also significant based on political affiliation (F=2.90, p=0.04). There were also significant differences that women's sports should be treated differently (F=4.43, p=0.01) and that only some sports are meant for both genders (F=8.88, p=<0.001).

The final significant factor based on political affiliation was that women's sports have limited visibility ($F=3.66$, $p=0.02$). Mostly participants who identified as republican or democrat had significant differences between these factors. This means that issues regarding gender in sport are influenced by more than just age or sport played. Political opinions also influence the way student-athletes perceive branding barriers.

Table 7.

RQ 5 MANOVA- Female Student-Athlete Perceptions of Branding Barriers

	Pillai's Trace	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.	Partial eta squared
Academic Year	0.91	1.31	55.00	325.00	0.08	0.18
Brand Support		2.38			0.05	0.14
Political Affiliation	0.57	1.35	33.00	192.00	0.11	0.19
Portrayal and Feelings		4.37			0.01	0.15
Brand Support		2.90			0.04	0.11
Treat Women's Sports Differently		4.43			0.01	0.16
Only Some Sports for Both Genders		8.88			<0.001	0.27
Women's Sports Visibility		3.66			0.02	0.13
Team or Individual Sport	0.14	0.94	11.00	64.00	0.51	0.14
Brand Support		4.91			0.03	0.62

While there is not much significance between female student-athletes on perceptions of branding, NIL policies, and branding barriers, consistent support can be identified from these responses received in this study. While some significant differences can be seen between female student-athletes of different academic year, political affiliation, and sport played, numerous factors were made apparent to be further investigated. In the next chapter, notable findings will be discussed on how they connect or differ from previous research.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Summary

The purpose of this research was to explore female student-athletes' perceptions about personal branding, branding barriers, and name, image, likeness (NIL) opportunities. While most variables did not yield statistical significance, there was still some significant variables found regarding social media and branding, NIL opportunities and policies, and perceived branding barriers for female athletes. The following section will interpret the results presented in the previous section to provide conclusions regarding each research question. Findings from each research question will be compared to previous studies to draw on any connections or differences. Finally, directions for future research and limitations will be addressed.

Support for Athlete Branding

In response to research question 1, participants in this study revealed female student-athletes support athletic performance (57.76 somewhat agree, 31.90% agree), attractive appearance (45.69% somewhat agree, 18.10% agree) and marketable lifestyle (54.31% somewhat agree, 33.62% agree) are necessary to build a successful brand. This is consistent with previous athlete branding research that identified key variables specific to athlete branding success (Parmentier & Fischer, 2012, Arai, Ko, Kaplanidou, 2013; Arai, Ko, Ross, 2014). The model of athlete brand image, or MABI (Arai et al., 2014), identified athletic performance, attractive appearance, and marketable lifestyle as key dimensions for athlete branding. The MABI, however, was never tested outside of professional athletes. Discovering the support among female student-athletes on the dimensions of the MABI extends the possibility that other

groups of athletes may benefit from the same model. This does not guarantee that every dimension of the model is supported equally among different populations. Results also show that while supported, participants considered their attractive appearance to be the least important factor of the three for developing a strong brand. If models such as the MABI are to be considered in female student-athlete branding, further research would need to investigate the significance of each dimension and the possible creation of new dimensions unique to the population.

Perceptions of Branding Concepts

Research question 2 examined participant's support of definitions for the concepts of brand identity and personal branding. The definition of brand identity received slightly less support (44.12% agree) than the definition of personal branding (73.53% agree). The results share similarities to previous research on student-athlete perceptions of brand identity and personal branding (Brogan, 2015; Bender, 2020; Park, Williams, & Son, 2020). The exact definitions of brand identity and personal branding used in this study came from Brogan's qualitative study on female athlete branding. The qualitative result from this study further supports Brogan's findings to help generalize the definition of brand identity and personal branding among female athletes. As opportunities for student-athletes change, further research may need to examine any potential differences on these results. While this research supports previous definitions of brand identity and personal branding, future studies could ask individual athletes how they would define each concept to try and discover any differences between age, sport, or even university.

Social Media as A Branding Tool

Research question 3 investigated what strategies served as key tools for athlete branding. Support for social media being a key branding tool was found (26.47% somewhat agree, 68.63% agree) and that the content someone posts on social media can impact their brand (6.86% somewhat agree, 91.18% agree). The higher percentage of agreement on the type of content someone posts indicates that participants are extremely aware of how their social media presence can affect their brand. These results lead to previous research that identifies social media being a useful tool for student-athlete branding, but there is a lack of education on how to properly use social media as a branding tool (Park et al., 2020; Bender, 2020; Van Horne, 2021). Further investigating education efforts on social media branding for student-athletes would contribute to the current findings in this study.

Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) Support

Research question 4 included items regarding female student-athlete perceptions of NIL compensation and policies across the NCAA, their institution, and the media. Significance was found between team or individual sports that NIL would create a divide among different sports and allowing NIL in universities. Research identified this significance in a study that analyzed both female and male student-athletes (Grambeau, 2020). It is difficult to provide equal opportunity among NIL benefits for all student-athletes. While athletic departments provide education and resources for student-athletes, they have no control in determining equal rights for NIL among their sports and athletes. As NIL policy continues to change, it is important to not lose focus on the well-being of all student-athletes instead of a select few.

Significance was found between team or individual sport and the impact of an athlete's marketable lifestyle and media attention leading to increase NIL opportunities. Again, this is seen as athletes who participate in revenue-generating sports receive increased NIL

opportunities. However, there are recent examples such as the 2022 NCAA Softball College World Series where a female sport has beat their male counterpart in viewership. This supports the results of this study that increased media attention would lead to increased branding opportunities. As some women's sports such as softball continue to gain attention, opportunities may increase as well.

Unique findings also showed that participants supported NIL student-athlete compensation (76.77% agree) and that NIL opportunities should be allowed in their university (76.77% agree). However, participants did not support that NIL opportunities are equal across all sports at their university (30.61% agree) and there are adequate NIL education efforts at their university (38.78% agree). The lower support for NIL education is consistent with previous research that a key issue in recent university policies is the lack of proper education (Grambeau, 2020; Van Horne, 2021). Over time, NIL education efforts can be identified and examined on how effective they are for their student-athletes. While student-athletes may not receive equal opportunities to benefit from their NIL, universities can strive to provide equal education and guidance resources.

Perceived Branding Barriers

Research question 5 addressed multiple variables regarding perceived female athlete branding barriers and looked to identify any similarities or differences between female student-athletes. This section had the most statistical significance across all independent variables of academic year, political affiliation, and team or individual sport.

The factor brand support had significant differences among academic year and team or individual sport. As younger student-athletes are emersed into a completely new college sports landscape, opinions and perceptions on branding and branding barriers will appear. With some

student-athletes making thousands, if not millions of dollars on NIL deals, other student-athletes who don't receive those benefits will identify barriers. This issue can be said for the type of sport played as well. Smaller team or individual sports may feel underrepresented due to their lack of attention or revenue generated at their institution. It is important to continually identify these barriers that certain sports and individual student-athletes face to ensure that the athlete is protected and given a high-quality education and athletic experience.

Differences between political affiliation and student-athlete perceptions of branding barriers showed the largest amount of significance in this study. Responses from participants who identified as republican significantly differed from participants who identified as democrat. The two most interesting significant results were that women's sports should be treated differently and that only some sports should be for both genders. This is tied to the norms that female athletes face to only participate in certain sports that "fit" their gender and stereotypical, feminine traits (Cooky, 2021). This issue can be extended to transgender athletes as well as the topic has become a political debate in many states. Future research should consider this political divide in opinion and apply it to not only male and female athletes, but transgender athletes as well.

Additional findings on branding barriers were noticed that were shared with previous research. Being bold and assertive, assuming physical attractiveness matters, performance and something else, invisible and limiting, and lack of proper brand management were all branding barriers identified by Lobpries, Bennett, Brison (2018). Participants supported the perceived branding barriers that women's sports have limited visibility (26.37% somewhat agree, 61.54% agree), women must do more than perform well in their sport to build a brand (25.00% somewhat agree, 51.09% agree), and those female athletes must be feminine and attractive to brand

themselves (46.74% somewhat agree, 22.83% agree). There was less support for the barrier that female athletes do not receive proper brand management training (35.16% somewhat agree, 16.48% agree). Participants did not show as much support to the perceived barrier that having masculine traits hurts their brand (33.70% somewhat agree, 8.70% agree). These findings suggest that female student-athletes perceive branding barriers differently from professional female athletes and may identify other barriers at the collegiate level.

Additional barriers for female student-athletes were identified in the study. Participants disagreed that the NCAA provides adequate resources to promote their image (18.89% somewhat agree, 4.44% agree), and provides proper brand management (12.09% somewhat agree, 12.09% agree). At the university level, participants showed more approval that their university allows them to promote their image (21.98% somewhat agree, 16.48% agree) and that they are not portrayed in a false image (26.97% somewhat agree, 25.84% agree). As the role of the NCAA remains in question after recent NIL policy changes, it is unclear of what the future governing body of collegiate athletics will look like. Future research should consider these findings to examine if the NCAA or the individual institutions are being equally representative to all student-athletes and what needs to be done to ensure that all student-athletes are properly represented. This may be more than just a difference in gender, but in political affiliation as well.

Conclusion

These findings are extremely valuable as they not only add to the sparce amount of research regarding female student-athlete branding, but also draw similarities to other research and models on athlete branding. Understanding the opinions and perspectives of student-athletes is important as the future of college sports heads into the unknown. This study identifies female

student-athlete differences in perceptions of branding, NIL, and branding barriers between the variables of academic year, political affiliation, and type of sport.

While branding theory suggests that there is a clear formula to developing a strong brand, the results of this study prove that there is much more to consider for building a strong brand as a student-athlete. There are significant differences among perceptions of branding based on gender, age, political affiliation, and even the type of sport an athlete plays. It is important to also note the non-significant data from this study. A lack of significance indicates that the female student-athlete participants of this study had very little difference in their thoughts and perceptions of the research questions addressed. While previous research provides evidence that barriers exist for professional female athletes to brand themselves, this study extends those barriers to collegiate female athletes as well. This research provides the idea there is still much to understand regarding female student-athlete perceptions of branding and the barriers that they face. It reinforces the fact that their voice and opinions are still not heard regarding multiple issues which leads to female student-athletes feeling underrepresented.

With branding opportunities in college sports increasing due to student-athletes being allowed to benefit from their NIL, the potential for future research in this area is quickly growing. This study was one of the first to explore how a specific group, female student-athletes, perceive various perspectives of branding as a collegiate athlete. Future studies could replicate the same method of the current study and compare results to examine any potential similarities or differences between the population. This has the potential to broaden the opinions of branding, brand barriers, and NIL among female student-athletes. Studies could also investigate further into individual research questions regarding personal branding and brand identity, potential branding barriers, and NIL policy. With there being so much variance between these research

questions, dividing them into separate studies may provide clearer results. The current sample of this study was enough to begin to understand female student-athlete perceptions about branding and NIL but does pose a limitation to being able to generalize the results to all female student-athletes.

This study only examined 13 sports across seven Division I athletic programs. To provide results that could be generalized to a larger population, future studies must examine opinions from a broader range of sports and athletic programs across all three NCAA divisions. Since Division II and Division III athletic programs have significantly lower revenue and funding, it would be interesting to see the level of support of athlete branding and NIL compensation. Further investigation could examine differences between different types of sports such as team sports or individual sports.

Limitations of this study include a low number of completed survey responses to help generalize the results to the large population of female student-athletes across three NCAA divisions. While obtaining 131 responses, this is still just a small amount compared to the thousands of Division I female student-athletes. Research regarding student-athlete branding and name, image, and likeness (NIL) policy has increased so much that many athletic departments have put policies in place to regulate the number of studies allowed to protect the time and privacy of their student-athletes. Rather than gaining access through an athletic department, responses could also be gathered through groups that consist primarily of student-athletes who may support the research topic. In addition, the low number of responses also led to certain demographics being skewed. This study was also not very diverse regarding race and ethnicity. Having a more diverse group of participants based on race and ethnicity may provide different findings as well.

Finally, a key limitation was that this study was conducted over a short period of time during a period of constant change. If the NCAA, their member institutions, or the federal government pass new policies or laws regarding student-athlete branding and NIL compensation, a follow-up study on the effects of those changes would be necessary. A longitudinal study over a much longer period (one year, five years, ten years) could compare any significant results as new opportunities are given to student-athletes. A longitudinal study could also conduct more qualitative research methods such as short answer or interview questions to expand on participant's answers and provide the "why" to their opinions. No matter what changes may occur in the future regarding student-athlete branding, research must be conscious of certain variables, such as gender in collegiate athletics, and its effect on the most important factor, the student-athletes themselves.

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Appendixes

Appendix A: Informed Consent

Online Consent to Participate in Research

Would you like to be involved in research at the University of Oklahoma?

I am Jared Thomas from the Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Oklahoma and I invite you to participate in my research project entitled Examining Personal Branding Strategies and Brand Identity of Female Collegiate Athletes. This research is being conducted online via Qualtrics survey software. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a current student-athlete at the University of Oklahoma. You must be at least 18-24 years of age to participate in this study.

Please read this document and contact me to ask any questions that you may have BEFORE agreeing to take part in my research.

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this research is to understand how female collegiate athletes identify and build their personal brands under the recent policy changes of benefiting from individual name, image, and likeness (NIL). I also want to learn if female collegiate athletes share similar opinions to professional female athletes on potential barriers in the brand building process.

How many participants will be in this research?

More than 100 female student-athletes across multiple sports will take part in this research.

What will I be asked to do?

If you agree to be in this research, you will be asked questions about how you define personal branding and brand identity, factors necessary for an athlete's brand, impact of social media on branding, potential barriers female athletes may face while building a brand, opinions on recent name, image, likeness (NIL) policies, and general demographic questions.

How long will this take?

Your participation will take around 10-15 minutes.

What are the risks and/or benefits if I participate?

Some questions may be personal or upsetting. Due to the research topic involving gender in intercollegiate athletics, additional emotional and social risks may occur. If you feel like answering these survey questions may be of harm to you in any way, you may skip them or quit the survey at any time. You may also contact the OU Counseling Center (620 Elm Ave., Rm.

201 Norman, OK 73019 / 405-325-2911) if you feel any emotional distress after participating in the study.

There are several demographics questions that may make it possible for someone to an re-identify who you are by combining these demographics. This risk will be minimized by not including identifiable information if an individual participant is referred to in the study and by reporting demographics in aggregate form. All data and results shared with future researchers will also not include individual survey results which would include this potentially identifiable information.

Anytime you share information online there are risks. A secure system is being used to collect this data, but there is no way to completely eliminate risk. There is a chance your data could be seen by someone who shouldn't have access to it. This risk is being minimized by storing data on a password-protected, encrypted computer. Data will also be destroyed after results have been collected and analyzed.

There are no benefits for participating in this study.

Will I be compensated for participating?

You will not be reimbursed for your time and participation in this research.

Who will see my information?

In research reports, there will be no information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be stored securely and only approved researchers and the OU Institutional Review Board will have access to the records.

Data are collected via an online platform not hosted by OU that has its own privacy and security policies for keeping your information confidential. Please note no assurance can be made as to the use of the data you provide for purposes other than this research.

What will happen to my data in the future?

After removing all identifiers, we might share your data with other researchers or use it in future research without obtaining additional consent from you.

Do I have to participate?

No. If you do not participate, you will not be penalized or lose benefits or services unrelated to the research. If you decide to participate, you don't have to answer any question and can stop participating at any time.

Who do I contact with questions, concerns or complaints?

If you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research or have experienced a research-related injury, contact Jared Thomas via email at jared.a.thomas-1@ou.edu or through phone at (417)241-1837. You may also contact the thesis advisor, Dr. Cynthia Frisby, at c.frisby@ou.edu or at (405)325-3513

You can also contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB) at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu if you have questions about your rights as a

research participant, concerns, or complaints about the research and wish to talk to someone other than the researcher(s) or if you cannot reach the researcher(s).

Please print this document for your records. By providing information to the researcher(s), I am agreeing to participate in this research*.*

This research has been approved by the University of Oklahoma, Norman Campus IRB.

IRB Number: _14208_　　　　　　　　　**Approval date: _04/14/2022_**

Appendix B: Survey Recruitment Flyer

I NEED YOUR HELP...

Gaylord COLLEGE

WITH A STUDY ON OPINIONS ABOUT BRANDING STRATEGIES USED BY FEMALE ATHLETES

● ● ●

The study seeks to understand how female collegiate athletes identify and build their personal brands under the recent policy changes of benefiting from individual name, image, and likeness (NIL). I also want to learn if female collegiate athletes share similar opinions to professional female athletes on potential barriers in the brand building process.

What will you do?

You will be asked questions about how you define personal branding and brand identity, factors necessary for an athlete's brand, impact of social media on branding, potential barriers female athletes may face while building a brand, opinions on recent name, image, likeness (NIL) policies, and general demographic questions. The survey will take about 5-10 minutes.

This survey is completely voluntary. There are no negative consequences if you don't want to take it. If you start the survey, you can always change your mind and stop at any time.

IRB APPROVAL, CASE #:14208

Use your mobile phone & scan QR code. It will take you directly to the survey or you can click on the link below.

https://qfreeaccountssjc1.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0B66iryajvxmQFo

Appendix C: Qualtrics Survey

Link: https://ousurvey.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5gOTB7MJmjZgeF0

QR Code:

Collegiate Athlete Branding Survey

Start of Block: Informed Consent

Q1   Online Consent to Participate in Research

Would you like to be involved in research at the University of Oklahoma?

   I am Jared Thomas from the Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Oklahoma and I invite you to participate in my research project entitled Examining Personal Branding Strategies and Brand Identity of Female Collegiate Athletes. This research is being conducted online via Qualtrics survey software. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a current student-athlete at the University of Oklahoma. You must be at least 18-24 years of age to participate in this study.

Please read this document and contact me to ask any questions that you may have BEFORE agreeing to take part in my research.

What is the purpose of this research?

   The purpose of this research is to understand how female collegiate athletes identify and build their personal brands under the recent policy changes of benefiting from individual name, image, and likeness (NIL). I also want to learn if female collegiate athletes share similar opinions to professional female athletes on potential barriers in the brand building process.

How many participants will be in this research?

Up to 150 female student-athletes across multiple sports will take part in this research.

What will I be asked to do?

If you agree to be in this research, you will be asked questions about how you define personal branding and brand identity, factors necessary for an athlete's brand, impact of social media on branding, potential barriers female athletes may face while building a brand, opinions on recent name, image, likeness (NIL) policies, and general demographic questions.

How long will this take?

Your participation will take around 10-15 minutes.

What are the risks and/or benefits if I participate?

Some questions may be personal or upsetting. Due to the research topic involving gender in intercollegiate athletics, additional emotional and social risks may occur. If you feel like answering these survey questions may be of harm to you in any way, you may skip them or quit the survey at any time. You may also contact the OU Counseling Center (620 Elm Ave., Rm. 201 Norman, OK 73019 / 405-325-2911) if you feel any emotional distress after participating in the study.

There are several demographics questions that may make it possible for someone to an re-identify who you are by combining these demographics. This risk will be minimized by not including identifiable information if an individual participant is referred to in the study and by reporting demographics in aggregate form. All data and results shared with future researchers will also not include individual survey results which would include this potentially identifiable information.

Anytime you share information online there are risks. A secure system is being used to collect this data, but there is no way to completely eliminate risk. There is a chance your data could be seen by someone who shouldn't have access to it. This risk is being minimized by storing data on a password-protected, encrypted computer. Data will also be destroyed after results have been collected and analyzed. There are no benefits for participating in this study.

Will I be compensated for participating?

You will not be reimbursed for your time and participation in this research.

Who will see my information?

In research reports, there will be no information that will make it possible to identify you.

Research records will be stored securely and only approved researchers and the OU Institutional Review Board will have access to the records.

Data are collected via an online platform not hosted by OU that has its own privacy and security policies for keeping your information confidential. Please note no assurance can be made as to the use of the data you provide for purposes other than this research.

What will happen to my data in the future?

After removing all identifiers, we might share your data with other researchers or use it in future research without obtaining additional consent from you.

Do I have to participate?

No. If you do not participate, you will not be penalized or lose benefits or services unrelated to the research. If you decide to participate, you don't have to answer any question and can stop participating at any time.

Who do I contact with questions, concerns or complaints?

If you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research or have experienced a research-related injury, contact Jared Thomas via email at jared.a.thomas-1@ou.edu or through phone at (417)241-1837. You may also contact the thesis advisor, Dr. Cynthia Frisby, at c.frisby@ou.edu or at (405)325-3513.

You can also contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB) at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu if you have questions about your rights as a research participant, concerns, or complaints about the research and wish to talk to someone other than the researcher(s) or if you cannot reach the researcher(s). Please print this document for your records. By providing information to the researcher(s), I am agreeing to participate in this research.

This research has been approved by the University of Oklahoma, Norman Campus IRB. IRB Number: _#####_   Approval date: _##/##/####_

○ Yes, I agree to the above information and wish to participate in the survey. (1)

○ No, I do not agree to the above information and wish to not participate in the survey. (4)

Q 1-3 **Section 1**
The following section contains survey items regarding the definitions of variables necessary for building a strong athlete brand image. Please read each statement carefully and select your desired response from the options to the right.

	Disagree (1)	Somewhat Disagree (2)	Neither Agree Nor Disagree (3)	Somewhat Agree (4)	Agree (5)
An athlete's sport performance is necessary to build a successful brand. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
An athlete's attractive external appearance is necessary to build a successful brand. (2)	○	○	○	○	○
An athlete's off-field marketable features are necessary to build a successful brand. (3)	○	○	○	○	○

Q 4-5 **Section 2**

The following section contains survey items regarding the definitions of two branding concepts. Please read each statement carefully and select your desired response from the options to the right.

	Disagree (1)	Somewhat Disagree (2)	Neither Agree Nor Disagree (3)	Somewhat Agree (4)	Agree (5)
Brand identity is the direction, purpose, and meaning of a brand (1)	○	○	○	○	○
Personal branding is displaying who you are and what you stand for to the world. (2)	○	○	○	○	○

End of Block: Block 3

Start of Block: Block 4

Q 6-11 **Section 3**

The following section contains survey items regarding social media use and the impact of social media on athlete branding. Please answer the following items and continue to the next section.

Q6 What social media platforms do you use?

☐ Facebook (1)

☐ Twitter (2)

☐ Instagram (3)

☐ Snapchat (4)

☐ YouTube (5)

☐ Pinterest (6)

☐ Linkedin (7)

☐ WhatsApp (8)

☐ Other (please specify) (9)
_____

☐ I don't use social media (10)

Q7 How much time, on average, do you spend on social media?

   ○ Less than 1 hour a day (1)

   ○ 1-2 hours a day (2)

   ○ 3-5 hours a day (3)

   ○ 5+ hours a day (4)

   ○ I don't use social media (5)

- -

Q8 Are you a consumer of sports media?

   ○ Yes (1)

   ○ No (2)

- -

Q9 Do you follow other professional and/or collegiate athletes on social media?

   ○ Yes (1)

   ○ No (2)

- -

Q 10-11 Please read each statement carefully and select your desired response from the options to the right.

	Disagree (1)	Somewhat Disagree (2)	Neither Agree Nor Disagree (3)	Somewhat Agree (4)	Agree (5)
Social media is a key tool for athlete branding. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
The type of content an athlete posts on social media can impact their brand. (2)	○	○	○	○	○

End of Block: Block 4

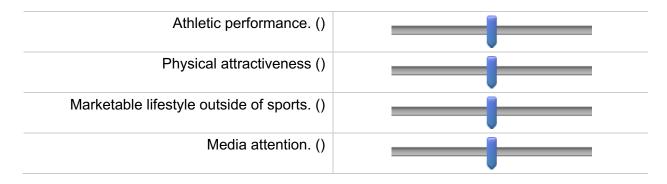Start of Block: Block 5

Q 12-18 **Section 4**
The following section contains survey items regarding student-athlete benefits through the use

of their Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL). Please read each statement carefully and select your desired response from the options to the right.

	Disagree (1)	Somewhat Disagree (2)	Neither Agree Nor Disagree (3)	Somewhat Agree (4)	Agree (5)
Student-athletes should have the opportunity to be compensated for commercial use of their name, image, and likeness (NIL). (1)	○	○	○	○	○
Universities should allow individual endorsements/sponsorships for student-athletes. (2)	○	○	○	○	○
My University provides equal opportunities for all athletes to benefit from their name, image, and likeness (NIL). (3)	○	○	○	○	○
Athletes who are obtaining name, image, and likeness (NIL) benefits tend to receive more media attention. (7)	○	○	○	○	○
The option of endorsement/sponsorship opportunities would impact a student-athlete's decision on where to attend school. (4)	○	○	○	○	○
Name, image, and likeness (NIL) would create a divide among different sports teams at a school. (5)	○	○	○	○	○
My University provides student-athletes proper education and resources on how to benefit from their name, image, and likeness (NIL). (6)	○	○	○	○	○

Q19 Out of the following, which attributes would aid in student-athlete's benefiting from their name, image, and likeness (NIL)? Please slide the following scales to the level you agree (1=no aid to NIL benefits, 10=great aid to NIL benefits).

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Athletic performance. ()	
Physical attractiveness ()	
Marketable lifestyle outside of sports. ()	
Media attention. ()	

End of Block: Block 5

Start of Block: Block 6

Q 20-42 **Section 5**
The following section contains survey items regarding potential barriers female athletes may

encounter when building their personal brand. Please read each statement carefully and select your desired response from the options to the right.

	Disagree (1)	Somewhat Disagree (2)	Neither Agree Nor Disagree (3)	Somewhat Agree (4)	Agree (5)
Female athletes who exhibit masculine traits struggle to brand themselves. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
Being feminine and physically attractive are important prerequisites to branding female athletes. (2)	○	○	○	○	○
College athletes can be both aggressive and nurturing regardless of sex. (3)	○	○	○	○	○
We should stop thinking about whether student-athletes are male or female and focus on other characteristics. (4)	○	○	○	○	○

Women's sports should be treated differently than men's sports. (5)	○	○	○	○	○
Only some types of sports are appropriate for both male and female athletes. (6)	○	○	○	○	○
Women must do more than perform well in their sport to build a successful brand. (7)	○	○	○	○	○
Female athletes are sexualized more than male athletes. (8)	○	○	○	○	○
I feel like I am expected to pose a certain way as a female athlete. (9)	○	○	○	○	○
I feel like I am expected to act a certain way as a female athlete. (10)	○	○	○	○	○

I feel like I am expected to perform a certain way as a female athlete. (11)	○	○	○	○	○
I feel like I am expected to look a certain way as a female athlete. (12)	○	○	○	○	○
Women's sports have limited visibility. (13)	○	○	○	○	○
The way female athletes are portrayed in the media is inaccurate and hurts our image. (14)	○	○	○	○	○
I feel like I must accept the way I am portrayed in the media to get any exposure. (15)	○	○	○	○	○
The NCAA provides equal opportunity for all athletes to promote their image. (16)	○	○	○	○	○

My University provides equal opportunity for all athletes to promote their image. (17)	○	○	○	○	○
Female athletes are not trained to manage their personal brands an must look to others for assistance. (18)	○	○	○	○	○
The NCAA provides adequate resources and assistance in brand management. (19)	○	○	○	○	○
My University provides adequate resources and assistance in brand management. (20)	○	○	○	○	○

The NCAA allows me to portray myself the way I want and allows me to say no to being portrayed in a false, sexual image. (21)	○	○	○	○	○
The media allow me to portray myself the way I want and allows me to say no to being portrayed in a false, sexual image. (22)	○	○	○	○	○
My University allows me to portray myself the way I want and allows me to say no to being portrayed in a false, sexual image. (23)	○	○	○	○	○

End of Block: Block 6

Start of Block: Default Question Block

✳

Q 43 What is your age?

_____

Q 44 What gender do you identify as?

○ Male (1)

○ Female (2)

○ Non-binary / third gender (3)

○ Prefer not to say (4)

○ Other (please specify) (5) _____

Q 45 What is your race or ethnicity? (Select all that apply)

□   American Indian or Alaska Native (1)

□   Asian or Asian Indian (2)

□   Black or African American (3)

□   Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish (4)

□   Middle Eastern or North African (5)

□   Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (6)

□   White/Caucasian (7)

□   Other race or ethnicity not listed (please specify) (8)
_____

Q 46 What is your political affiliation?

○ Democrat (1)

○ Republican (2)

○ Independent (3)

○ No affiliation (4)

○ Other (please specify) (5) _____

Q 47 What is your current academic year?

○ Freshman (1)

○ Sophomore (2)

○ Junior (3)

○ Senior (4)

○ Graduate Student (1st year) (5)

○ Graduate Student (2nd year) (6)

○ Other (please specify) (7) _____

Q 48 What sport do you play? (Please select all that apply)

☐ Basketball (1)

☐ Cross Country (2)

☐ Golf (3)

☐ Gymanstics (4)

☐ Rowing (5)

☐ Soccer (6)

☐ Softball (7)

☐ Tennis (8)

☐ Track and Field (9)

☐ Volleyball (10)

☐ Other (please specify) (11)
_____

- -

Q49 What University/College do you currently attend?

_____

End of Block: Default Question Block

Appendix D: Survey Item Identifier

Survey Q:	SPSS Name:
Consent	Consent_Y_N
An athlete's sport performance is necessary to build a successful brand.	Athletic_Performance
An athlete's attractive external appearance is necessary to build a successful brand.	Attractive_Appearance
An athlete's off-field marketable features are necessary to build a successful brand.	Marketable_Lifestyle
Brand identity is the direction, purpose, and meaning of a brand.	Brand_Identity_Def
Personal branding is displaying who you are and what you stand for to the world.	Personal_Branding_Def
What social media platforms do you use?	Social_Media_Platform
What social media platforms do you use?	Social_Media_Platform_TEXT
How much time, on average, do you spend on social media?	Time_On_Social_Media
Are you a consumer of sports media?	Consumer_of_Sports_Media
Do you follow other professional and/or collegiate athletes on social media?	Follow_Other_Athletes
Social media is a key tool for athlete branding.	Social_Media_Key_Tool
The type of content an athlete posts on social media can impact their brand.	Type_of_Content
Student-athletes should have the opportunity to be compensated for commercial use of their name, image, and likeness (NIL).	NIL_SA_Compensation
Universities should allow individual endorsements/sponsorships for student-athletes.	NIL_Allowed_in_Universities
My University provides equal opportunities for all athletes to	NIL_Allowed_in_My_University

benefit from their name, image, and likeness (NIL).	
The option of endorsement/sponsorship opportunities would impact a student-athlete's decision on where to attend school.	NIL_Impact_on_Deciding_School
Name, image, and likeness (NIL) would create a divide among different sports teams at a school.	NIL_Creates_Divides
My University provides student-athletes proper education and resources on how to benefit from their name, image, and likeness (NIL).	NIL_Ed_from_My_Univeristy
Athletes who are obtaining name, image, and likeness (NIL) benefits tend to receive more media attention.	NIL_Leads_to_Media_Attention
Athletic performance.	NIL_Athletic_Performance
Physical attractiveness.	NIL_Physical_Attractiveness
Marketable lifestyle outside of sports.	NIL_Marketable_Lifestyle
Media attention.	NIL_Media_Attention
Female athletes who exhibit masculine traits struggle to brand themselves.	Masculine_Traits
Being feminine and physically attractive are important prerequisites to branding female athletes.	Feminine_and_Attractive
College athletes can be both aggressive and nurturing regardless of sex.	Aggressive_and_Nurturing
We should stop thinking about whether student-athletes are male or female and focus on other characteristics.	No_Focus_on_Gender_in_Sports
Women's sports should be treated differently than men's sports.	Treat_Womens_Sports_Differently
Only some types of sports are appropriate for both male and female athletes.	Only_Some_Sports_for_Both_Genders

Women must do more than perform well in their sport to build a successful brand.	More_Than_Just_Performance
Female athletes are sexualized more than male athletes.	Female_Athletes_Sexualized_More
I feel like I am expected to pose a certain way as a female athlete.	Pose_a_Certain_Way
I feel like I am expected to act a certain way as a female athlete.	Act_a_Certain_Way
I feel like I am expected to perform a certain way as a female athlete.	Perform_a_Certain_Way
I feel like I am expected to look a certain way as a female athlete.	Look_a_Certain_Way
Women's sports have limited visibility.	Womens_Sports_Visibility
The way female athletes are portrayed in the media is inaccurate and hurts our image.	Media_Portrayal_Hurts_Image
I feel like I must accept the way I am portrayed in the media to get any exposure.	Accepting_Media_Portrayal
The NCAA provides equal opportunity for all athletes to promote their image.	NCAA_Promoting_Image
My University provides equal opportunity for all athletes to promote their image.	University_Promoting_Image
Female athletes are not trained to manage their personal brands an must look to others for assistance.	No_Brand_Training
The NCAA provides adequate resources and assistance in brand management.	NCAA_Brand_Management
My University provides adequate resources and assistance in brand management.	University_Brand_Management
The NCAA allows me to portray myself the way I want and allows me to say no to being portrayed in a false, sexual image.	NCAA_Allowing_My_Image
The media allow me to portray myself the way I want and	University_Allowing_My_Image

allows me to say no to being portrayed in a false, sexual image.	
My University allows me to portray myself the way I want and allows me to say no to being portrayed in a false, sexual image.	Media_Allowing_My_Image
What is your age?	Age
What gender do you identify as?	Gender
What gender do you identify as?	Gender_TEXT
What is your race or ethnicity?	Race_Ethnicity
What is your race or ethnicity?	Race_Ethnicity_TEXT
What is your political affiliation?	Political_Affiliation
What is your political affiliation?	Political_Affiliation_TEXT
What is your current academic year?	Academic_Year
What is your current academic year?	Academic_Year_TEXT
What sport do you play?	Sport_Played
What sport do you play?	Sport_Played_TEXT
What University/College do you currently attend?	University_Attended

Appendix E: IRB Approval

The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Approval of Study Modification – Expedited Review – AP0

Date:	April 14, 2022	**IRB#:**	14208
Principal Investigator:	Jared A Thomas	**Reference No:**	733910

Study Title: Examining Personal Branding Strategies and Brand Identity of Female Collegiate Athletes

Approval Date: 4/13/2022

Modification Description: Expanding enrollment

The review and approval of this submission is based on the determination that the study, as amended, will continue to be conducted in a manner consistent with the requirements of 45 CFR 46.

To view the approved documents for this submission, open this study from the My Studies option, go to Submission History, go to Completed Submissions tab and then click the Details icon.

If the consent form(s) were revised as a part of this modification, discontinue use of all previous versions of the consent form.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the HRPP office at (405) 325-8110 or irb@ou.edu. The HRPP Administrator assigned for this submission: Kat L Braswell.

Cordially,

Ioana Cionea, Ph.D.
Vice Chair, Institutional Review Board

Table of Means

Figure 1.
Survey Item Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	**SD**
Athletic Performance	4.10	0.83
Attractive Appearance	3.59	1.15
Marketable Lifestyle	4.22	0.73
Brand Identity Def	4.23	0.82
Personal Branding Def	4.63	0.69
Type of Content	4.89	0.38
Social Media Key Tool	4.63	0.61
NIL SA Compensation	4.58	0.89
NIL Allowed in Universities	4.56	0.99
NIL Allowed in My University	3.48	1.38
NIL Impact on Deciding School	4.50	0.80
NIL Creates Divides	4.19	0.95
NIL Ed from My University	3.66	1.23
NIL Leads to Media Attention	3.91	1.12
NIL Athletic Performance	8.35	1.65
NIL Physical Attractiveness	7.26	1.98
NIL Marketable Lifestyle	7.57	1.99
NIL Media Attention	8.61	1.68
Masculine Traits	3.06	1.13
Feminine and Attractive	3.75	1.02
Aggressive and Nurturing	4.42	0.79
No Focus on Gender in Sports	4.09	1.20
Treat Women's Sports Differently	2.20	1.28
Only Some Sports for Both Genders	2.09	1.41
More Than Just Performance	4.00	1.32
Female Athletes Sexualized More	4.53	0.74
Pose a Certain Way	3.95	1.21
Act a Certain Way	4.00	1.25
Perform a Certain Way	3.83	1.24
Look a Certain Way	4.12	1.07
Women's Sports Visibility	4.47	0.84
Media Portrayal Hurts Image	3.62	1.03
Accepting Media Portrayal	3.38	1.16
NCAA Promoting Image	2.70	1.27
University Promoting Image	3.07	1.34
No Brand Training	3.48	1.03
NCAA Brand Management	2.79	1.02
University Brand Management	3.35	1.17
NCAA Allowing My Image	3.16	1.04

University Allowing My Image	2.95	1.07
Media Allowing My Image	3.52	1.17