PREPARING FOR EXIT FROM SPORT: A

PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF THE

PRE-TRANSITION EXPERIENCES OF DIVISION I

FEMALE INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETES

By

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Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
July, 2010

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PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF THE

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without a number of individuals who provided invaluable support and guidance during the completion of my doctoral degree. To my adviser Kerri Kearney: Thank you so much for hanging in there with me after all these years even when I may have wandered off the path from time to time. I was fortunate to have such a caring and committed mentor to guide me in my work. To my other committee members: Lu Bailey: my unofficial mentor and academic hero. You are a true scholar and someone I hope to model myself after in my future career. Ed Harris and Bridget Miller: I am so appreciative of the commitment you made to this project and the critical input and guidance you provided.

I am grateful to the administrators at my study site who worked with me to make this study possible as well as to the amazing young women who shared their stories with openness and honesty. I will always think of these five women and use what they have taught me to continue my work to support the needs of college athletes.

It is also a pleasure to recognize the dear friends I made in the doctoral program whom also played a role in helping me to achieve my goals. To Jesse Mendez: You are a true student-centered professor and I thank you for all that you have done for me. I enjoy the friendship we developed and look forward to continuing it in the future. To Kathleen Kennedy and Lupita Fabregas: You cannot know how much of a support you were to me

when we started the program together. Although we may each go our separate ways, I will always feel a connection to you both because of the experiences we shared in graduate school.

I would like to thank the Professional Preparation Committee of ACPA – College Student Educators International for their financial support of this project through the Nevitt Sanford Writing Award.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my parents, David and Suzy Archer for always supporting me no matter what I decided to do. I consider myself lucky to have such loving parents who afforded me all of the opportunities they did not receive. I am also thankful for the members of my extended family and appreciate their thoughts of love and support over the years.

Finally, I owe my deepest gratitude to my partner and soul mate Matt. You are the most caring, supportive, and selfless person I know. Your constant encouragement and support of my dream to finish the PhD made this moment possible. I cannot wait to take the next step in my life with you at my side and I look forward to many more happy years together.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"There are over 380,000 student athletes, and most of us go pro in something other than sports" (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2007). The continued rise in popularity of intercollegiate athletics has arguably created an environment in which universities expect substantial commitments of time and energy from their student-athletes. Such demands have important consequences for these athletes as they can influence the academic, social, and personal development of this small but often highly visible student population. In fact, involvement in intercollegiate athletics is similar to full-time employment, particularly for those student-athletes competing in revenue-producing sports, due to the considerable commitment required. It is an endeavor from which an aspect of personal identity is often derived (McPherson, 1980).

Members of American society have come to accept a number of characteristics generally associated with the NCAA Division I intercollegiate athlete and his or her participation in college sport. Institutions classified as Division I typically support larger athletic programs and budgets and are distinguished from other NCAA member institutions, such as those who compete in Division II and Division III athletics, by the number of sports they must field and participation minimums (NCAA Membership, National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2010). There are a number of prominent social narratives associated with the Division I athlete. These include being less intelligent or less academically qualified than the average student; being worshipped for superior athletic prowess by fans

and others within the university and larger community, a theme more often associated with male sports; and belonging to a privileged group which enjoys greater access to resources and opportunities than their non-athlete peers (Watt & Moore, 2001). These perceptions of athlete life, along with prevailing social norms concerning what it means to be a college athlete, can shape students' self-perceptions during their undergraduate careers and beyond.

Universities expect student-athletes to spend a great deal of time and energy refining their sports-related skills and striving for athletic success. In addition to focusing on their role as athletes during the four to five years of their undergraduate careers, many of these students have previously participated in some form of competitive athletics for ten years or more during the primary and secondary school years. Such lengthy participation in sports, often beginning in early childhood, can facilitate their preoccupation with athletics well before entering college (Kleiber et al, 1987). The demands of intercollegiate competition, coupled with a lengthy prior history of athletic participation in their formative years, can influence the development of *athlete* as the primary aspect of identity. This over identification with the athlete role often precludes a deeper exploration of other potential facets of the student's sense of self (Watt & Moore, 2001).

Participants in intercollegiate sport often focus on developing and maintaining their athletic identities, or what Brewer, Van Raalte, and Linder (1993) describe as the degree to which one identifies with the athlete role. However, in spite of this focus Ogilvie and Howe (1986) point out that the end of the undergraduate sports career marks the termination of this role for approximately 99% of college student-athletes. The reality

of departing a role that has defined four to five years of their college experience, and their identity many years prior is one that has the potential to create adjustment difficulties for intercollegiate athletes preparing to exit competitive sport. A number of researchers (Baillie, 1993; Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Brewer et al., 1993; Hallinan & Snyder, 1987; Parker, 1994) highlight this potential for difficulty in adjusting to post-eligibility life.

One cannot separate the process by which student-athletes prepare for retirement from competitive sport from the larger context of higher education. Postsecondary education as an institution is inherently concerned with gender, class, race and other contextual factors that influence its many missions in our society. Furthermore, higher education, like intercollegiate athletics, has been a historically male-dominated institution and scholars have noted the array of implications this has for faculty, students, and athletes (David, 2009; Veri, 1999, Yllo, 1989). This context is critical for examining the many experiences of athletes facing transition from sport within the broader culture of higher education.

In an effort to move beyond traditionally male-oriented research on athlete transition, the current study focuses on the unique experiences of female student-athletes who choose to engage in sport at the intercollegiate level. In fact, the literature addresses numerous differences in the characteristics ascribed to student-athletes in general and those associated with the female intercollegiate athlete. Female athletes experience a number of distinct issues beyond those faced by their male peers, mainly due to influences from a male-dominated sport culture. For instance, female athletes are more likely than their male counterparts are to have coaches and trainers of the opposite sex

and to encounter fewer resources and scholarship opportunities (Women's Sports Foundation, 1997).

There are a number of other unique factors facing female student-athletes including: fewer outlets for formal sport involvement (e.g. professional leagues, developmental leagues, coaching positions, etc.) following college as compared to male peers; concerns related to nutrition and body image; questions from peers and others regarding sexual orientation; and, most significantly, the reality that female college sports is often less highly regarded than male sports (Person, Benson-Quaziena, & Rogers, 2001).

Additional research suggests female athletes may also face a number of relatively unexplored potential challenges related to their adjustment to life after sport. Baillie's (1993) review of literature on athlete retirement from various levels of competitive sport (as cited in Cogan & Petrie, 2002), acknowledge this gender-based concern by highlighting that, "given the limited availability of competitive post-collegiate athletic opportunities, female athletes may experience [increased] psychological distress concerning their retirement from sport" (p. 83). Having fewer outlets for continued sports participation following college may increase the intrinsic motivation for females to compete in intercollegiate athletics when compared to their male counterparts. This reality has the potential to reinforce a stronger identification with the athlete role, which may later create greater adjustment difficulties following retirement from sport.

*Statement of the Problem*

In current literature addressing career transition from sport, a number of researchers find that athletes, including some college student-athletes, successfully adjust

to life following exit from competitive sport (Allison & Meyer, 1988; Baillie, 1992; Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985; Swain, 1991; Webb et al, 1998). While only limited research specific to intercollegiate athletes is available, sport retirement studies indicate that athletes, in general, face no greater challenge transitioning from sport than do their non-athlete peers experience when facing other life transition events (Curtis & Ennis, 1988; Snyder & Baber, 1979). In addition, a few studies show some athletes expressed feelings of relief and enthusiasm for their new lives outside of competitive sport (Alferman, 1995).

However, a number of other studies suggest retirement from sport can be traumatic for some athletes (Baillie, 1993; Baillie & Danish, 1992; Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Brewer et al., 1993; Hallinan & Snyder, 1987; Ogilvie & Howe, 1986; Parker, 1994). Murphy (1994) found that athletes' experiences in competitive sport might leave them more vulnerable to adjustment problems than their non-athlete peers. These studies examined how strongly participants identified with the athlete role and how their identification affected their ability to develop a new sense of self following sport retirement. Findings suggest over identification with the athlete role, often a function of prolonged engagement with sports participation, led to greater adjustment difficulties following formal career exit from sport. In fact, authors such as Alfermann (1995) and Wylleman (1995) find that as many as 15% of career athletes at all levels (e.g. college athletes, elite and professional athletes) face significant difficulties adjusting to life following the conclusion of formal sport participation.

The literature on athlete transition also indicates that struggles may occur in spite of a variety of institutional resources available to assist college athletes with their

transition (Anderson & Morris, 2000; Carr & Bauman, 2002). A variety of educational and life-skills programs (CHAMPS/Life Skills Program) exist to support student-athletes in their preparation for post-eligibility life. These programs include individual as well as group based interventions developed by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and university athletic departments around the country. Full-time professionals whose role is to focus on life-skill development and support of athletes often administer these programs for student-athletes throughout the course of their undergraduate careers. The goal of these programs is to provide intercollegiate athletes with the necessary skills to excel in their college careers and to adjust to life after sport. Many of the CHAMPS/Life Skills programs accomplish this by focusing on a number of factors identified as important to the student-athlete's success including intellectual development, athletic excellence, personal development, career counseling, and a commitment to community service (Carodine, Almond, & Gratto, 2001; Chartrand & Lent, 1987; Constatine, 1995; Goral, 2005; Nall, 2009).

What is less clear in the literature is how these programs might define successful transition following exit from intercollegiate sport. However, based on the common goals of the NCAA CHAMPS/Life Skills program and other institution-specific support services, it appears a former athlete may have experienced successful transition if he or she meets four specific goals. These goals include: 1) accepting exit from sport and developing a positive reinterpretation of no longer being involved in intercollegiate competition; 2) securing employment after college; 3) remaining active in continued planning for a future beyond sport; and 4) developing effective coping strategies and

support networks to assist in separating from the previous sport experience (Grove, Lavallee, & Gordon, 1997; Petitpas, Brewer, & Van Raalte, 2002).

What current research does not address fully are the *individual experiences* of student-athletes prior to exiting a career in intercollegiate athletics. Following the end of a prolonged engagement with sport, college athletes must face the reality of impending exit from competitive sport as they complete their eligibilities and approach the conclusion of their undergraduate careers. Exploring the pre-transition experiences of college athletes prior to formal exit from the institution may assist researchers in understanding how athletes begin to make sense of their eventual transition and develop strategies to manage sport retirement. With contemporary research focusing on formal transition from college as well as the athlete's evolving experience in subsequent years, scholars may miss a necessary understanding of earlier perspectives that influence future transition. Exploring the experiences of athletes prior to formal transition may provide additional insight on the process by which athletes prepare themselves for eventual transition to post-eligibility life.

When specifically examining the process of female athletes navigating sport retirement, Petitpas et al. (2002) suggest one must consider a number of unique considerations when viewing this population. The relative difference between the popularity of male and female sports may influence the level of resources provided to each group. As Title IX sought to address in 1972, this imbalance in resources results in less support afforded to female student-athletes. Support can refer to a number of items including recognition and support from the campus and larger community; institutional resources related to academic, social, and vocational needs; and the quantity and quality

of facilities available to female athletes as compared to their male peers in the same or other sports. These differences may contribute to some of the adjustment difficulties suggested in the literature. In spite of these differences, Heywood (1999) highlights some positive aspects of female sport participation (e.g. increased self-esteem, learning cooperation and leadership skills, better mental and physical health) that help support female athletes during their sport careers in their life beyond intercollegiate competition. In addition, fellow teammates who share common successes and challenges as well as athletic support staff who work to address the needs of female athletes in Division I sport can serve to mediate this lack of support. However, when female athletes feel less supported by their non-athlete peers and the institution as a whole they may have less success in seeking out and developing support systems adequate in assisting in their preparation for transition, as well as their lives following retirement from intercollegiate sport.

*Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study is to discover the meanings that female intercollegiate athletes ascribe to their experiences immediately preceding career exit from NCAA Division I sport. The period on which this research focuses is from the end of the athlete's final season of eligibility to her formal exit from the institution. For four study participants this ranged from November 2009 to May 2010. The fifth athlete was a graduate student who completed her last season of eligibility, and undergraduate education, within the last 12 months (Spring 2009). My intent is to capture the essence of subjects' lived experiences in this key moment of preparing for retirement from sport and

to explore how aspects of engaging with the reality of impending transition influence their ability to adjust to a new sense of self beyond intercollegiate sport.

<p align="center">*Significance of the Study*</p>

*Need to Explore Problem*

When examining the literature on athlete transition, I identified a number of important gaps in our understanding of this phenomenon. The most glaring deficiency in the literature is that few studies actually focus on the transition experiences of *college* athletes, and female athletes in particular (Harrison & Lawrence, 2002, 2003, 2004; Lally, 2007; Petitpas et al., 2002). A majority of research concerns itself with the transition experiences of elite and professional athletes (Allison & Meyer, 1988; Curtis & Ennis, 1988; Drahota & Eitzen, 1998; Koukouris, 1991, 1994; Lerch, 1981; Reynolds, 1981; Sinclair & Orlick, 1994; Svoboda & Vanek, 1982; Swain, 1991; Werther & Orlick, 1986). For those studies that do seek to address the phenomenon of college athlete transition, the vast majority focus on male athletes or combine male and female athlete data. This lack of attention to the unique perspectives of the female student-athlete as she faces retirement from sport reflects the masculinized reality of contemporary college sport and the homogenization of the intercollegiate athlete in many research studies. Female athletes receive less attention overall in the college sports environment and are, therefore, often assumed to share many of the same concerns as their male counterparts. However, prior research has highlighted many differences between the experience of and treatment male and female athletes receive. It is these differences in experience that the current project seeks to explore. As such, one major goal of this study is to close a gap in the literature by contributing to research on female college student-athletes and their

experiences related to retirement from competitive sport. This knowledge is important as it allows for a greater understanding of the female athlete experience and provides advances to inform future practice in supporting the needs of this student population.

A second important deficiency in the current literature on athlete retirement is the lack of *qualitative* studies that seek to understand the *experience* of college student-athletes (Brown, Glastetter-Fender, & Shelton, 2000; Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985; Harrison & Lawrence, 2002, 2003, 2004). The vast majority of prior studies on student-athlete transition have utilized quantitative methods to examine sport retirement (Allison & Meyer, 1988; Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985), and this trend appears to be prevalent in studies of intercollegiate athletics in general (Hemmingson, 2009). This project utilizes a qualitative approach to examine the experience of female athletes preparing for exit from sport. The hope of the current study is that such an understanding will supplement and deepen our knowledge of how female student-athletes prepare themselves for the reality of post-eligibility life, as well as provide a foundation for future qualitative research exploring the lives of students who choose to compete in college sports.

A final important gap in athlete transition literature is the age of available information on the student-athlete experience. When examining contemporary research on career exit from sport I found a preponderance of major studies in the field to be at least 20 years old. Conducting a more recent examination of the experience of college athletes is crucial for a number of reasons. First, the knowledge obtained from recent studies on athlete transition would do much to update our understanding of the experience of today's Division I intercollegiate athlete exiting sport. The circumstances

of contemporary college sports has changed a great deal in recent history with greater

recognition of the revenue generating aspects of intercollegiate sport and the increased

visibility of the big-time college athlete. Such changes have no doubt influenced the

perspective of current college student-athletes. Second, the cultural experiences of the

current generation of college students, and therefore college athletes, are very different

from the experience of students 10 to 20 years ago. Updating information on the needs

and experiences of today's student-athlete is vital as university administrators and athletic

departments rely on this knowledge to develop effective support programs for this

population. This study seeks to highlight the perspectives and experiences of the

contemporary female college student-athlete as she prepares for sport retirement.

*Intended Audience*

The lack of current insight on the experience of female student-athletes preparing

for sport retirement is the main problem this study seeks to address. Although the primary

purpose is a focus on experience, I hope the knowledge obtained in this research is useful

in informing practical applications related to supporting the needs of college student-

athletes. Acquiring additional information on the pre-transition experiences of these

students may assist scholars and practitioners who work with intercollegiate athletes.

Researchers can benefit from the contribution of this study in updating the existing

literature as well as gaining further insight into athlete experiences as they prepare for

exit from sport. In addition, college and university administrators can benefit from the

knowledge generated in this study by better understanding the perspectives of student-

athletes during their preparations for post-eligibility life. Such knowledge will allow

university athletic departments to maintain a greater sensitivity to these athletes.

Additionally, a deeper understanding of athlete experience may allow for refining

existing resources and developing new ones, which would more effectively support

student-athletes and equip them with the tools necessary for future success. Finally, I

expect insights gained by exploring the experiences of retiring college student-athlete to

be of interest to the athletes themselves. Providing information, which would help in

normalizing the transition experience and aiding student-athletes to see potential

commonalities in the process for others like themselves, could be of great benefit. The

shared successes and challenges uncovered may allow athletes to be more successful in

coping with the issues they face during this time of change.

<div align="center">*Research Question*</div>

Specifically, this study is concerned with the following research question:

*What is the lived experience of the Division I female intercollegiate athlete as she*

*prepares for transition from sport?*

<div align="center">*Definitions*</div>

For the purposes of this study, *student-athlete* refers to a college or university

student participating in intercollegiate sport at her respective institution during the years

afforded by her eligibility as outlined by the National Collegiate Athletic Association

(NCAA). Throughout this study, I use the term student-athlete interchangeably with other

common terms in the literature that connote a similar description (e.g. athlete, college

athlete, intercollegiate athlete).

Athletes in this study are those who are currently preparing for career exit from

sport or who have experienced sport retirement within the last year following the end of

their final season of eligibility. I wish to capture only the experience of those student-

<div align="center">12</div>

athletes who have no plans to continue a career in competitive sport, thus encountering a sufficient disruption from sport culture. In terms of this study, sufficient disruption from sport is removal from sport culture (e.g. practices, mandated scheduling, recognition by the campus and wider community as an athlete) such that the student-athlete must begin the process of exploring alternate identities beyond that of being a full-time intercollegiate athlete.

*Researcher's Statement*

Before moving forward with a phenomenological study on female college athlete transition, I feel it is important to explore the reasons why a thirty-one year old, Caucasian male, doctoral student in higher education would choose to examine such a topic. In order to capture faithfully the essence of participants' experiences I first seek to recognize aspects of my own experience and to explore the assumptions that shape the views I hold of this phenomenon. This process, often referred to as bracketing is a critical component of phenomenological inquiry, which is the guiding methodological approach for this study. Researcher reflexivity is vital both as an exercise assisting in an understanding of the preconceptions that may influence the scholarly process as well as to provide greater transparency to the reader. The following statement is my attempt to reflect upon my position in relation to this topic and to highlight the unique aspects of my experience that shape my views of the phenomenon and my interest in conducting this study.

I would describe myself as an avid sport spectator, particularly of college athletics, having derived my love of Southeastern Conference football from my youth in the Deep South. Growing up in southern Alabama in the shadow of Crimson Tide

football, "War Eagle" and Paul "Bear" Bryant, I learned to form allegiances early in life and to maintain unwavering solidarity to my chosen team. Although I would describe myself as more than a casual sports fan, I never competed in intercollegiate athletics as an undergraduate student and have no first-hand knowledge of college sport culture and the challenges student-athletes face. However, a series of unanticipated events led me to this project and my subsequent interest in examining the experiences of the sometimes highly publicized, yet often elusive, college student-athlete.

Early in my doctoral career, I began working with my current dissertation advisor on a project that was the inspiration of one of her master's student advisees. This student, who I will call Bridget, was a former female scholarship basketball player at a large, Midwestern, Division I institution. Following completion of her undergraduate career, Bridget decided to enroll in graduate school to continue her education. I was fortunate to develop a relationship with this young woman while working jointly on a number of research projects. As I learned more about her life as an intercollegiate athlete and her experiences following exit from competitive sport, her story continued to intrigue me. Bridget admitted that at the end of her sports career she had no clue on what she wanted to do next and was waiting for something to "fall into her lap". Luckily, Bridget's mother completed a graduate school application for her. After admission to graduate school, Bridget was relieved that she finally had some path to follow that would take her into a life beyond sport. However, the realities of adjusting to this new life were just beginning for Bridget.

As we became friends over the course of our work together, Bridget shared some of the challenges she faced during her two years of graduate school. When she first

arrived at the institution as a newly admitted graduate student, she had no idea how to enroll for classes on her own or even where to buy books for her classes. As a college student-athlete, advisers completed these things for her so she could focus her full attention on sports. Now that Bridget was no longer a student-athlete she had to learn many of the basic university processes her non-athlete peers took for granted. This learning curve was sometimes steep but the perseverance and hard work Bridget learned during her time as an athlete helped her to remain successful as a driven graduate student.

As our friendship continued into her final year of graduate school, I began to solidify my interest in this dissertation topic and began to talk more candidly with Bridget about her continuing adjustment to life after sport. She admitted an ongoing struggle to develop an identity beyond student-athlete that affected the way she viewed herself and what she wanted to do with her life after completing graduate school. Bridget was not sure she could ever see herself as anything other than a student-athlete and her 6'5" stature reinforced this identity for her daily. She once told me everyone always asks her where she played basketball because they assume from her height she must have been an athlete at some point. However, no one asks her 6'3" younger brother if he played basketball. Even though she was no longer an athlete and was attempting to expand her identity, something as simple as her height, combined with her gender, regularly triggered her prior identity.

Bridget also struggled with her identity when contemplating her life after graduation. She identified with sport culture and knew she wanted to work in a career helping other student-athletes successfully deal with issues she had faced. However,

returning to athletics might reinforce the ambivalence she experienced in deciding who she was when she was no longer a college athlete.

I am happy to say that my friendship with Bridget still exists to this day and I am thankful to have shared in her successes and challenges as she navigated her transition from student-athlete to life after sport. Following graduation, she ultimately decided to pursue her passion for supporting the needs of college athletes and she serves as an important role model for other young women who seek to pursue lives beyond college sport. She is still working to forge her own identity as someone who is no longer an athlete but still has a place in intercollegiate sport.

I believe it important to share information about women such as Bridget and her experiences following exit from intercollegiate sport. Her story serves as a poignant anecdotal narrative and contextual grounding for the current study. The experiences of college athletes are varied and contextual and, just because one athlete has difficulties with transition, one cannot assume all intercollegiate athletes will struggle as well. However, Bridget's story serves as an important reminder that the vast majority of student-athletes must eventually face transition from sport. Higher education researchers should work to understand this phenomenon and the potential it has for influencing athletes' future success.

There are a number of additional factors leading me to the current project. They include my previous professional background in student affairs administration and professional counseling. Trained to serve as an agent of change for clients who chose to utilize my services, I have had much experience in assisting individuals in navigating life transitions and helping to bolster their ability to successful manage both anticipated and

unanticipated change events. I have always been intrigued with aspects of identity development, personal choice, and coping strategies related to crisis and transition. This professional experience with change is one motivation for pursuing research into understanding student-athletes' transition experiences.

Following my original training as a clinician, I moved into a career as a student affairs professional where my passion for supporting the developmental needs of others became even more focused on the lives of college students. As someone who has spent over six years in student affairs at the time of writing this project, I have a desire to explore the lives of college student-athletes who receive little attention in the larger context of higher education research. When taken together, my background in counseling and student affairs makes the current topic one of great interest to me and my hope is to make an important contribution to this area of scholarship in order to benefit the lives of student-athletes.

*Chapter Summary*

The intent of this first chapter was to introduce the reader to the proposed study by providing an overview of relevant scholarship on college student-athletes and the reality of transition from competitive sport. Additionally, this chapter presented the intended problem of focus along with the study's purpose and central research question. Finally, I ended the chapter with a discussion of the importance of and rationale for examining the pre-transition experiences of student-athletes as well as intended audiences for this study. The remainder of this work consists of four additional chapters presenting a number of topics related to the current study. Chapter 2 provides the reader with a synthesis of contemporary literature necessary for developing an understanding of the

culture of intercollegiate athletics, student-athlete identity, and career exit from sport.

Chapter 3 presents a detailed account of my research protocol including the intended

methodology and methods for data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 presents findings

obtained from study participants. Finally, Chapter 5 concludes the dissertation by linking

a detailed discussion of study findings within the current body of literature in the field as

well as their implications for future research. This final chapter also includes study

limitations and conclusions for research, theory, and practice.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Before studying the experiences of college athletes preparing to leave sport, I wish to present a number of topics related to intercollegiate athletics and the contemporary college student-athlete. The purpose of this literature review is to examine current scholarship relevant to the study of intercollegiate athletes and to provide a foundation of knowledge for this area of research. The following sections first include a brief introduction to college sports and a variety of characteristics ascribed to student-athletes. Following this introduction, I next present a discussion of athlete identity and the potential consequences associated with development of that identity. Finally, this chapter highlights research related to athlete transition, including studies specific to student-athletes and the intervention strategies colleges and universities often provide them prior to and during their transition. Additionally, I conclude this review of the literature with a summary of research and the potential this study has in filling gaps in existing literature on intercollegiate athlete transition.

*Intercollegiate Athletics and the College Student-Athlete*

Intercollegiate athletics are a highly visible and enduring source of pride as well as a significant revenue stream for many contemporary colleges and universities (Duderstadt, 2003). It is a practice enjoying a long history within higher education beginning with the emergence of college crew teams during the mid-nineteenth century (Zimbalist, 1999). Although this early form of intercollegiate competition was originally

popular among the institutions of the time, Zimbalist noted football developed a foothold in college sports during the 1880s and continued as one of the most celebrated and lucrative of all intercollegiate sports. A number of higher education historians (Funk, 1991; Lester, 1999; Sperber, 2000) document the rise of major college sports, and the subsequent consequences this popularity has had for higher education. The success of college sports, particularly the high profile, revenue producing sports of men's football and basketball, ushered in the era of high stakes intercollegiate competition we experience today. Cialdini et al. (1976) present one reason for our culture's growing interest in athletic competition due to a described "basking in reflected glory" effect (p. 366). When a spectator's chosen team performs well then he or she also reaps the benefit of the victory by association. The increased following of college athletics, coupled with a high-stakes sports culture revolving around institutional pride and financial benefit, has created an environment where college student-athletes are both highly cherished and heavily scrutinized. This scrutiny has a number of important implications for student development, which I discuss in later sections on athlete identity.

*Historical Context of Female Intercollegiate Athletics*

Since its original inception and continued growth into a revenue-generating endeavor, intercollegiate athletics has remained decidedly dominated by a patriarchal culture. The vast majority, if not all, revenue producing sports programs center on male student-athletes and previous research suggests the support female athletes receive at many institutions is disproportionately small compared to what their male counterparts have historically enjoyed (Petitpas et al., 2002). Although somewhat improved in recent decades, the imbalance referenced above is one that has existed throughout the history of

women's athletics, both in secondary and higher education. This reality prompted a movement during the late 1960s to spur activism and institutional change concerning equitable opportunities for female athletes to participate in collegiate sport (Birrell, 1987). This phenomenon was part of a larger movement for women's rights that shaped higher education overall.

In a review of the historical context of female participation in college sport, Birrell (1987) divides this history into three distinct phases. The first phase, which she refers to as increased participation, includes the period between 1971 and 1981 and is marked by the formation of the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIWA) as an advocacy body for female athletes as well as the passing of Title IX (explained briefly in a following section) by the United States Congress. Birrell notes during this decade, participation in female sports at the college level increased by 150% and budgets for these sports grew up to 29 times larger than previous allocations.

Birrell (1987) characterizes the second phase of female athletic participation as structural consolidation. This consolidation marked the beginning of formal integration of women's programs into the male-dominated athletic departments of post-secondary institutions. Although advocates believed this signaled a positive step for women's sports, the patriarchal structure of mainstream intercollegiate sport culture forced many female administrators and athletes to adapt to a new operational environment diminishing much of their previous influence and perspective.

Birrell (1987) describes the final phase of female athletic participation as incorporation. Incorporation involves the inclusion of women's athletics into the high stakes culture of college sports resulting in a struggle for scarce resources and a continual

requirement to defend female athletics as an important and valuable aspect of the overall sport culture in higher education. As Birrell notes related to the first phase of female sport participation, Title IX was an important catalyst in the expansion of opportunities for females in all levels of sport, and particularly in intercollegiate sport.

*Female intercollegiate athletics and Title IX.* According to Kaplan and Lee (1995) Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (20 U.S.C. §1681), henceforth referred to as Title IX, is a statute that "prohibits sex discrimination by public and private educational institutions receiving federal funds" (p. 218). Title IX, therefore, is important to the majority of colleges and universities due to the various federal funding sources these institutions draw upon. With only seven specific exceptions, colleges desiring to take advantage of financial aid paid by the federal government on behalf of students as well as government grants supporting a variety of research and service initiatives must adhere to the requirements set forth in the statute (Title IX, Educational Amendments of 1972). This policy also gave women a legal basis with which to challenge inequities.

Title IX prohibited discrimination in sports beginning in 1972. However, Congress continued to refine the statue (in 1974 and again in 1988), in an effort to clarify what constituted equity. Educational institutions were required to ensure women's athletic programs received resources on par with their male counterparts, including comparable facilities, equipment, and supplies and access to academic support services and coaching. Spurred by instances of non-compliance, later court rulings, such as *Cohen v. Brown University* (1996), provided additional clarity requiring institutions meet at least one of three legal requirements. The first of these requirements include proportionality, or the idea that colleges and universities must provide intercollegiate level participation

opportunities for male and female students in numbers substantially proportionate to their respective enrollments. The second requirement involves a history and continuing practice of providing equitable sport experiences for both males and females - institutions must show a prior history and continuing practice of program expansion in intercollegiate athletics that seeks to address the needs of the historically underserved sex (in virtually all cases this includes female students). Finally, institutions must meet the sport participation interests and abilities of their male and female students - the present program must fully accommodate the interests and abilities of the members of the underrepresented sex. Although these criteria provide a framework for compliance with Title IX, they are under continuous scrutiny at most higher education institutions and are a struggle to interpret effectively.

*College Student-Athlete Characteristics*

When undertaking a study on college student-athlete experience it is helpful to recognize many of the broad characteristics associated with this unique student population. The continued popularity of intercollegiate athletics over the last century led researchers to ask questions about athletes' experiences. Although much of the literature on student-athletes focuses on  challenges they face during their college careers, it is important to recognize the status of college student-athlete also comes with a number of benefits, including access to additional support services, which I discuss later in this literature review. Studies such as Harrison (1999), Parham (1993), Person et al. (2001), and Watt and Moore (2001) also highlight a number of other characteristics, including the privileges and challenges associated with the contemporary college student-athlete.

These researchers suggest many of the challenges student-athletes face are no different from those of their non-athlete peers. However, current literature fails to recognize a number of differences between the experiences of student-athletes, which vary due to various contextual factors including gender, sport, institutional type, and Division in which they compete (e.g. NCAA Division I versus Division II or Division III). When commenting on the current state of the intercollegiate athlete a majority of studies fails to make a distinction between these various sub-groups and instead focuses on the homogenized "student-athlete". Research on this homogenized model of the student-athlete may explain some of the contradictory information regarding athlete transition in the literature. Unless otherwise noted, I primarily present the student-athlete in this literature review from the perspective of the homogenized intercollegiate athlete as traditionally represented; however, this study recognizes the limitations of such a perspective and urges additional research on the unique experiences of one of the often overlooked sub-groups within this population, the female college athlete.

Parham (1993) discusses both the characteristics of student-athletes that are similar to their non-athlete peers as well as those that are unique to this population. Some of the developmental tasks Parham associates with both groups during the college years include developing personal competencies and an identity separate from family, fostering intimacy in interpersonal relationships, learning to articulate personal values and ethical beliefs, and setting future career goals. However, Parham also points out that sport culture poses a number of challenges for student-athletes beyond those faced by non-athletes. The first of these concerns relates to balancing the demands of academics with

athletic participation, as athletes must fulfill all obligations associated with their student and athlete roles.

Watt and Moore (2001) also highlight the issues student-athletes face in juggling multiple commitments during the course of a day. The authors found student-athletes often experience more inflexible schedules than their non-athlete peers and are more likely to have study times, class schedules, meal times, and other similar activities, chosen for them. However, both authors point to a number of benefits the student-athlete receives in the form of athletic and academic counselors, scheduling assistance, and other institutional support systems colleges and universities often provide.

A second reality associated with participation in intercollegiate sport involves the potential for isolation and fewer opportunities to participate in campus and community activities. Due to athletic and academic demands, student-athletes are less likely to participate in experiences enjoyed by their non-athlete peers such as extracurricular and social events, part-time employment, and other various leisure activities outside of the college environment (Parham, 1993; Watt & Moore, 2001). Their limited opportunities to engage in informal social and leisure activities with non-athlete peers can limit their connections with the larger student body and campus community. In addition, student-athletes tend to segregate themselves into groups with fellow athletes since many follow the same schedules and share similar classes, mealtimes, and other planned activities. These tendencies toward congregating with other athletes have the potential to limit severely the time intercollegiate athletes spend developing meaningful relationships with their non-athlete peers. Nishimoto (1997) suggests the effect of social isolation on the student-athlete in reducing his or her ability to achieve a number of important learning

and developmental tasks, as compared to non-athlete peers. The potential isolation student-athletes face from the larger student body is a reality of their often singular focus on sports participation, even when considering the deep connections athletes make with fellow team members as well as other athletes on their campus (Reimer, Bea, & Schroeder, 2000).

A third challenge for student-athletes is learning to manage realistically success or failure in athletic endeavors (Parham, 1993). Student-athletes experience enormous pressures related to their participation in intercollegiate sport. These pressures can create a drive to achieve which has consequences whether the student-athlete wins or loses. Fans shower highly gifted student-athletes with praise and adoration when they achieve victory for their respective teams. Living in the limelight, particularly for those athletes participating in highly visible revenue sports can be difficult for college athletes to accept and the vocal praise they receive for their athletic prowess can inflate their sense of self and increase over identification with the role of athlete (Parham, 1993). Additionally, student-athletes continually flirt with potential failure in their careers. These students struggle when losing a competition and feel frustrated and disappointed when letting down their team and other supporters. Learning to manage success and failure in the context of intercollegiate competition differs from the experiences of their non-athlete peers.

A fourth aspect of the college athlete experience relates to the athlete's struggle to avoid injury and to monitor his or her own physical health (Parham, 1993). As one would expect, physical health and performance is an ongoing concern for student-athletes as they push themselves to compete at the highest level within their sport. When athletes do

experience injury, they often feel compelled to ignore the pain they experience and push themselves to excel. The constant pressure to ensure their physical well-being, while still maintaining a high level of performance in sport is yet another unique aspect of the contemporary college student-athlete's experience.

A final reality Parham (1993) associates with student-athletes involves their ability to manage relationships with teammates, coaches, and others during the athletic career and beyond. As mentioned previously, athletes often develop close relationships with fellow teammates and other athletes, as well as coaches and members of the athletic staff. Issues such as conflict and cooperation, which appear in all interpersonal relationships, are familiar to both athletes and their non-athlete peers. However, athletes must learn to depend on their fellow teammates, particularly in team sport, as they spend a great deal of time together practicing, traveling, and participating in other group events. Being in such close proximity to their fellow athletes and coaches creates a unique dynamic in which student-athletes must balance the realities of closeness and distance with their athlete peers. Additionally, the development of deep interpersonal relationships with teammates during sport competition can have consequences for athletes in the future, as they retire from sport and lose touch with former athletes. An in-depth discussion of research related to athlete transition follows in a later section of this literature review.

*The female student-athlete in higher education.* There has been increasing interest in examining the experiences of minority and female student-athletes within the larger context of higher education (Harrison, 1999; Person et al., 2001; Person & Lenoir, 1997). A number of post-structuralist and critical theories recognize gender, socioeconomic, and

race-based issues as constitutive of higher education (David, 2009). In this view, a perpetuation of oppressive structures within college sport culture is a natural outcome of the racist, sexist, and colonialist realities that exist as part of the fabric of contemporary higher education. In fact, Wiley (1991) argues that many current policies and practices within intercollegiate athletics, including academic and social support programs, serve to rationalize instances of social and racial stratification within sport. Although a majority of prior research has focused on the impact of institutionalized racism on African-American student-athletes (Spigner, 1993), additional studies are beginning to investigate the experience of other non-majority athletes (e.g. female, Hispanic, & LGBT students) within the racist, masculinized, and homophobic structures that exist within higher education and intercollegiate sport culture. One cannot study female athletes without recognizing the overarching structures of higher education within which she performs and that serve a role in shaping her experience within intercollegiate competition.

In spite of the above reality, prior literature suggests female athletes reap a number of benefits from sport participation when compared with both female non-athlete peers as well as male athletes (Heywood, 1999). One difference between male and female athletes is academic performance. Birrell (1987) found female athletes tend to perform better academically than males. Other benefits of sports participation for women, as compared to their non-athlete female peers, include increased levels of mental and physical health, greater self-esteem, development of skills related to cooperation and leadership, and the chance to dispel stereotypes of women being weaker or less competent than their male counterparts.

In addition to the number of positive aspects of female sport participation, authors including Birrell (1987) and Person et al. (2001) discuss four potential concerns associated with the contemporary female student-athlete. The first of these concerns centers on the prevalence of eating disorders and nutritional concerns facing female athletes. Although this appears to be a growing concern for male athletes in some sports as well (Petrie et al., 2008), it is a problem extensively documented for female student-athletes. A number of female athletes experience pressure to maintain body weights that they or their coaching staff believes to be ideal for high-level competition in their chosen sport (Hawes, 1999). In addition, depending on the perceived masculinity or femininity of the sport, female athletes also received some pressure from prevailing social norms on achieving an ideal body type. In fact, Hawes also cites the prevalence of eating disorder related side effects in female athletes resulted in the coining of the term "female-athlete triad" (p. 24). This concept corresponds to three common conditions female athletes experience, which includes disordered eating, amenorrhea, and osteoporosis. The concerns female athletes face when dealing with the pressures of competition coupled with overarching societal beliefs related to the ideal female body create a culture in which eating disorders have unfortunately become increasingly common.

A second challenge includes sports-related injury. This concern is similar to what student-athletes experience in general but average differences in the male and female bodies as a whole create unique situations for athletes pushing themselves to compete at high levels. It is widely accepted that injuries are more heavily sports-related as opposed to sex-related (Arendt, Angel, & Dick, 1999); however, some differences between male and female bodies may account for additional injury threats for female athletes. In fact,

from a review of the literature, Person et al. (2001) reported that female basketball players were between 2-5 times more likely to experience anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) injuries than were their male peers.

A third characteristic associated with the female college athlete is the degree of sexual discrimination and harassment they experience on average. As reported previously, the culture of intercollegiate athletics is one that is marked by decidedly masculine ideals and male dominance (Birrell, 1987). The level of dedicated resources available to male student-athletes often exceeds what female athletes receive (Person et al., 2001). Title IX provides some assurances that higher education institutions meet the sport participation needs of females in a fashion that is equitable to their male counterparts. However, as some authors indicate (Petitpas et al., 2002), this does not necessarily provide equal resources for male and female sport teams, and many have contested the success of Title IX in creating greater opportunities for female athletes practically since its inception. In fact, female athletes must sometimes share facilities with their male counterparts leading to a potentially hostile and intimidating environment. The authors also point to another recent development having both positive and negative implications for women's sports - namely, that media and the public are taking an increased interest in female athletes and their abilities through greater coverage of female sporting events such as intercollegiate competition, the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA), and the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA). This has created another concern related to harassment for female athletes as increased visibility can lead to unsolicited attention including unwelcome contacts and the potential for stalking (Person et al., 2001).

A final aspect of the female athlete experience involves the lack of appropriate role models for those athletes wishing to continue their career in the world of professional and elite female sport. This is one issue at the forefront of women's intercollegiate athletics as a number of additional outlets for women's sports (e.g. WNBA, LPGA) have grown in recent decades (Person et al., 2001). Although these sport career alternatives are increasing for female athletes who complete their intercollegiate eligibility, they are still fewer in number than options available to men. Such opportunities represent an extremely small percentage when considering the total number of college athletes, both male and female, who eventually play professionally. The NCAA estimates this number to be approximately 1% (Estimated Probability of Competing in Athletics Beyond the High School Interscholastic Level, National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2010).

The continued lack of professional sport roles for women leads to a culture in which female student-athletes have few role models when deciding whether to continue their lives in professional sports or begin preparations for formal career exit. The lack of knowledge female athletes typically have when attempting to make informed decisions about a potential future in professional sports (e.g. financial considerations, selecting an agent, understanding what a life as a professional athlete might mean for that individual) is recognized by athletic department personnel (Person et al., 2001). As such, some institutions have recently made efforts to address this gap by providing targeted support services for their female athletes; however, not all of these athletes have access to such services and there is a lack of adequate documentation of their efficacy in preparing female college athletes for life after sport.

*Athlete Career Transition From Sport*

The vast majority of existing research on athlete transition concerns itself with the experiences of elite professional and Olympic athletes (Allison & Meyer, 1988; Baillie, 1992; Curtis & Ennis, 1988; Drahota & Eitzen, 1998; Koukouris, 1991, 1994; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Swain, 1991). Petitpas et al. (2002) confirm researchers continue to focus on the retirement process of professional and elite amateur athletes to gain a general understanding of athlete transition. Although there are some studies on intercollegiate athletes and transition (Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985; Hallinan & Snyder, 1987; Harrison & Lawrence, 2002, 2003, 2004; Hinitz, 1988; Kleiber & Brock, 1992; Kleiber et al., 1987; Lally, 2007; Parker, 1994; Snyder & Baber, 1979), I found none that specifically focusing on the transition experiences of female college athletes. In order to explore current literature on this topic, I begin my review with a discussion of studies that investigate the broad phenomenon of athlete transition from the combined perspectives of elite, professional, and student-athletes. Next, I present the concept of athlete identity including how a strong association with this role can have consequences for future transition. Finally, I closely examine those studies specifically related to student-athlete transition.

In a review of the major research on athlete transition, Alfermann (2000) presents a framework for understanding previous studies, which consists of two main areas of focus. The first of these two research areas include descriptive studies that seek to understand the continuing development of retired athletes following transition. In particular, these studies are concerned mainly with broad themes related to occupational success of the athlete and future life satisfaction (Alfermann, 1995; Curtis & Ennis, 1988;

Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985; Koukouris, 1991; Lerch, 1981; Perna, Ahlgren, & Zaichkowsky, 1996; Reynolds, 1981; Snyder & Baber, 1979). Alfermann (2000) finds this body of research primarily, although not without some disagreement (Alfermann, 1995; Koukouris; Sands, 1978), suggests athletes typically adjust well to career exit from sport overall and they are as successful in their lives following transition, as are their non-athlete peers (Curtis & Ennis, Snyder & Baber).

The second main area of research on athlete career transition Alfermann (2000) includes studies focused on the psychosocial processes of retirement. This research investigates athlete's individual perceptions of and coping strategies utilized in adjustment to transition (Allison & Meyer, 1988; Grove et al., 1997; Parker, 1994; Swain, 1991; Webb et al., 1998; Werther & Orlick, 1986). Alfermann (2000) reports the major contributions of these studies are providing a more detailed understanding of the athlete's experience by framing transition out of sport as a critical life event that must be navigated (Ogilvie, 1987; Sinclair & Orlick, 1994). As mentioned in the previous section, a number of studies in this vein suggest many athletes are successful in their adjustment when facing retirement from sport (Allison & Meyer; Swain; Webb et al.).

Alfermann (1995) acknowledges the findings discussed above showing many athletes successfully adjust to life after sport. However, she raises an important question regarding athlete transition based upon findings from her own research. Although some athletes in her study expressed relief in ending their sport careers and enthusiasm for their lives after sport, a number of respondents (13%) also reported severe adjustment problems that included psychological distress and feelings of helplessness. Furthermore, after examining several related studies on this topic, Wylleman (1995) found up to 15%

of athletes struggled with their transition following career exit from sport. Both of these studies focused on samples of elite athletes, however, previous research suggests athletes at all levels may also experience some adjustment difficulties when faced with impending transition (Baillie & Danish, 1992; Brewer et al., 1993; Parker, 1994). Although the above findings generally suggest only a minority of athletes encounter problems after leaving sport, it is important to consider the potential ramifications for the less-studied area of intercollegiate sport, which remains the intended focus of this study. With a large number of student-athletes participating in college sports, estimated to be 380,000 by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA, 2007), the potential for 15% of this population (as many 57,000 students) struggling to adjust to a life after sport is significant and should be a concern to all stakeholders within higher education.

Why do some athletes seem to adjust well to life after sport while others struggle so intensely with their transition? Based on literature discussed previously it appears the answer to this question is unknown and, therefore, deserves additional attention from researchers. This issue is significant as it suggests there is much to be learned regarding the experience of female athletes navigating career transition, which could help researchers and practitioners develop more effective ways to support this group when dealing with the almost certain inevitability of sport retirement. To develop a more thorough understanding of the transition experiences of athletes, it is necessary to discuss athlete identity and the role it plays in influencing the ability of the athlete to adjust to her future beyond sport.

*Athlete Identity*

As discussed in Chapter 1, prolonged engagement in athletic pursuits can foster students' development of an athletic identity. Therefore, before examining those studies concerned with student-athlete transition, I believe it necessary to discuss the concept of athlete identity and its implications for the transition process of college athletes. The following sections offer a number of frameworks, which researchers use to understand the influence of athlete identity on college student development and how the athlete role shapes the way student-athletes perceive their college experiences. Providing a foundation for understanding athlete identity is crucial before moving forward with a study centering on the transition experiences of female college athletes.

Prior research defines athletic identity as "the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role" (Brewer et al., 1993, p. 237). These authors describe athlete identity as a construct with both cognitive and social aspects subject to influence by both self and others. Put simply, intrapsychic factors and beliefs, as well as the extent to which coaches, family, friends, and others view the individual as an athlete, influences the degree to which he or she identifies with that role. In addition to defining and exploring the meaning of athletic identity, Brewer et al., as well as a number of other researchers (Pascarella & Smart, 1991; Wolniak, Pierson & Pascarella, 2001), are also concerned with the positive and negative aspects of maintaining a strong athletic identity. Some of the positive characteristics associated with development of athletic identity for both men and women include greater self-confidence, higher engagement in social activity, and maintaining higher levels of physical activity and exercise (Brewer et al.). Other potential benefits for men include increases in social involvement, satisfaction with

college, effective interpersonal and leadership skills, and motivation to achieve the degree as compared with their non-athlete peers (Pascarella & Smart).

The latter authors did not specifically explore the effect of athletic participation on female student-athletes, which is consistent with the lack of research on female athlete experiences. Much of the prior literature on the impact of athletic participation on students reflects the current focus on more male dominated aspects of college athletics (e.g. revenue producing sports involving male athletes) while ignoring the potential benefit of understanding the role of sports on the development of female student-athletes. Another example of this disproportionate attention includes a 2001 study by Wolniak et al. on the effects of intercollegiate athletic participation on male student outcomes. The authors found decreased levels of openness to diversity and self-motivated learning for nonrevenue athletes in their study sample. However, the researchers did not find significant differences in these two areas for male football and basketball players in their study. The studies above show the varied and sometimes conflicting effects identification with the athlete role can have on student outcomes; the limited efforts to understand specifically the female athlete; and the need to understand better, how athletic participation influences diverse students in a variety of contexts.

Other scholars including Howard-Hamilton and Sina (2001) are also concerned with the impact of athletic identity on the development of both male and female student-athletes. Specifically, these researchers investigate the intersection of athletic identity formation and the subsequent ability of intercollegiate athletes to achieve a number of developmental tasks associated with the college experience. Howard-Hamilton and Sina examine a number of prior contributions to the area of student development theory and

focus their study of the impact of athlete identity on student-athletes in two primary areas of development: psychosocial and cognitive.

*Athlete identity and psychosocial development.* When examining the psychosocial development of the college athletes, Howard-Hamilton and Sina (2001) draw from models based on the work of Erikson (1980) and Chickering and Reisser (1993). Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory of identity development involves an eight-stage model. This model includes the emergence of a development crisis between two potential outcomes at each of the eight stages. The individual must resolve these developmental crises before he or she can moving on to the next stage. Howard-Hamilton and Sina apply the fourth and fifth stages of Erikson's psychosocial model of development, industry versus inferiority and identity versus identity diffusion, to explore the student-athlete experience. They highlight prior studies suggesting the student-athlete typically appeared to resolve easily the crisis associated with Erikson's fourth stage, industry versus inferiority or developing the recognition of one's self as capable in some favored task (e.g. athletic competition), as recognition of her athletic prowess served to signal an accomplished sense of industry (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990).

Furthermore, Howard-Hamilton and Sina found existing literature suggests college athletes were likely to face a more difficult challenge in navigating Erikson's fifth stage, identity versus identity diffusion (e.g. developing an identity congruent with one's beliefs about himself or herself), than their non-athlete peers. This perceived struggle revolved around the reality that athletes sometimes receive an inordinate amount of praise from coaches, family, and significant others based upon their athletic achievements (Harris, 1993). This praise is often contextual depending on the sport and offered to male

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athletes competing in highly visible, revenue-producing sports more than females. Continued recognition for superior athletic performance at the expense of other areas of student success (e.g. academics, artistic achievement, and interpersonal ability) has the potential to create an unhealthy and distorted focus on athlete identity over other aspects leading to difficulty in resolving the crisis associated with Erikson's fifth stage. This outcome has the potential to create possible identity diffusion (role confusion) for the athlete.

A second theoretical lens utilized by Howard-Hamilton and Sina (2001) includes a psychosocial theory of identity development proposed by Chickering and Reisser (1993). Their model consists of seven vectors in which an individual must address a number of developmental tasks and is one that has enjoyed wide application within the field of college student development. Specifically, Howard-Hamilton and Sina focus on stages associated with 1) developing interpersonal competence and 2) moving through autonomy to interdependence in their review of literature on athlete identity. They report over identification with athletic identity can have particular consequences for these two stages of development. College students who strongly identify with the athlete role may struggle to develop effective interpersonal competence. This difficulty is often a result of the lack of time student-athletes are able to spend interacting with non-athlete peers due to mandated practice time, homework and study sessions, and other scheduling conflicts beyond their control. In addition, since the benefits of teamwork and team bonding are so entrenched in sport culture many student-athletes tend to focus more on building relationships with other teammates who are likely to understand the challenges associated with their current college experience (Harris, 1993).

Howard-Hamilton and Sina (2001) also found the stage of moving through autonomy toward interdependence as a potential challenge for intercollegiate athletes. Chickering and Reisser (1993) suggest all adolescents must gain independence from their parents and families of origin. This experience is also required for college student-athletes who leave home to attend the institutions of their choice. However, athletes may experience some delay in their ability to develop and maintain independence due to the rigorous nature of their schedules and the patriarchal environment and expectations of participation in college sports. In addition, athletes have the potential to form deep connections with coaches and other athletic staff who athletes perceive as members of an extended family (Harris, 1993). These aspects of the college sports experience can serve to reinforce identification with the athlete role and inhibit athletes from achieving a number of developmental tasks associated with their experience as college students.

*Athlete identity and cognitive development.* In addition to examining the impact of athlete identity on psychosocial development, Howard-Hamilton and Sina (2001) also present an overview of literature addressing the potential influence of athletic participation on the cognitive development of student-athletes. They draw from two models of cognitive development popular in the literature on college student development. These two theories are Perry's (1999) theory of intellectual development and Kohlberg's (1984) theory of moral development.

Perry's theory of intellectual development includes a nine-stage process beginning with a view of the world in simplistic, dualistic terms and ending with a "realization of the contingent nature of knowledge, relative values, and [eventually] the formation and affirmation of their own commitments" (King, 1978, p. 38). Howard-

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Hamilton and Sina apply this theory to the cognitive development of student-athletes by suggesting the nature of intercollegiate sport culture may inhibit college athletes from progressing from dualism to relativism. The student-athlete must often follow absolute rules and schedules his or her coaches and other athletic staff enforce. This environment leaves little room for the athlete to challenge assumptions and ideas and has the potential to reinforce a dualistic idea of leader (athletic staff) and follower (student-athlete).

Howard-Hamilton and Sina (2001) also draw from the work of Kohlberg (1984) to provide insight on how identification with the athlete role effects the cognitive development of students. Kohlberg's theory of moral development consists of six distinct stages of moral judgment that provide the basis for the ability of an individual to resolve moral dilemmas (Guthrie, 1997). These stages correlate to individual motivation when determining right and wrong and can include a simple desire to avoid punishment, a wish to please an authority figure, or other increasingly abstract and complex determinations of right and wrong based upon the individual's ability to process a number of contextual and situational variables. Again, the authors suggest, based upon the nature of sport culture, athletic participation can affect the ability of the student-athlete to move through Kohlberg's six stages of moral development. Athletic success often comes from gaining the praise of coaches, teammates, and fans. This focus on pleasing authority figures may serve to inhibit college athletes from developing a more complex ability to engage in moral reasoning beyond simply the appeasement of those in power. The discussion above shows how a strong identification with the athlete role can have important consequences for the development of student-athletes during their college years. In the next section, I

provide a review of literature addressing the effect of athlete identity on future sport transition.

  *Athlete identity and future sport transitions.* When considering research on athlete identity, what is of particular interest in this study is the relationship between identification of the athlete role and career transition from sport. Petitipas et al. (2002) identify the connection between career transition and the extent of identification with the athlete role. A number of studies seek to explore this topic, however, most of them center on the experiences of professional and elite male and female athletes, a focus that parallels much of the existing research in the field (Brewer et al., 1993; Migano et al., 2006). In a broad sense, studies on the transition experiences of elite and professional athletes including Grove et al. (1997), Lavallee, Gordon, and Grove (1997), and Webb et al. (1998) examined the influence a strongly held sense of athlete identity may have on predicting the quality of future career transition. In addition, these authors also explored the efficacy of coping methods the athlete utilized when dealing with exit from sport. Grove et al. conducted a survey of 48 (28 female, 20 male) elite-level athletes competing on Australian national or state teams in various sports. The authors then conducted a follow-up study, utilizing a micronarrative autobiographical methodology, with a sub-sample of 15 (11 females, 4 males) respondents from the initial group who reported experiencing severe adjustment difficulties (Lavallee et al., 1997). Webb et al. analyzed questionnaires completed by 93 current and former NCAA Division I student-athletes (45 female, 48 male). Each of the above studies found athletes who most strongly identified with the athlete role had the most difficulty in navigating the career transition process. A highly developed sense of athlete identity influenced a wide range of coping strategies

and processes including "social and emotional adjustment, pre-retirement planning, and career decisions" (Grove et al., p. 191) and variations in "athletic identity were found to be significant determinants of adjustment for athletes upon career termination" (Lavallee et al., p. 129).

Other researchers (Brown et al., 2000; Lally & Kerr, 2005) focus on the relationship between athlete identity and sport transition for more specific concerns such as career development and decision-making. In one of the few studies examining intercollegiate athletes, Brown et al. sampled a group of one hundred eighty-nine male and female college student-athletes and found the number of hours they participated in sport and the extent to which they immersed themselves in the role of athlete had an inverse relationship to reported self-efficacy in career-decision making. In essence, these findings support the idea of a link between athletic preoccupation and identity foreclosure and future career decision-making. This relationship may influence some athletes' ability to adjust successfully to the reality of life after sport. Although the above study references career-decision making difficulties faced by athletes who strongly identified with the athlete role, Lally and Kerr found some shift might occur in athlete identity as college students approach the completion of their academic careers. These researchers interviewed four male and four female college students who stated their interest in continuing in professional sports waned during the fourth and fifth years in college, and their experience with sports helped them to realize they should focus more on academic and career related goals.

Based upon a review of research highlighting the relationship between development of an athlete identity and future career transition from sport, it is clear the

above studies make important contributions to the literature on athlete identity and transition. However, no studies specifically focus on female college athlete transition in order to investigate this group's unique experience separate from their male peers. What is clear from this apparent gap in research is there remains a need to conduct further studies regarding student-athlete transition, and more specifically, the understudied female athlete, in an effort to provide additional information on this phenomenon.

*Support strategies for student-athletes in transition.* Institutions typically provide various support services to contemporary college athletes both during their sport careers and in the period leading up to exit from sport. I briefly mentioned the role of student-athlete services in supporting the needs of the intercollegiate athlete in Chapter 1; however, I wish to provide more information on these services in the context of athlete career transition. A number of institutions, including those within higher education, recognize the value of providing support services to athletes (Carodine et al., 2001; Chartrand & Lent, 1987; Denson, 2002; Goral, 2005; Keim & Strickland, 2004; Nall 2009). The NCAA mandates these services and programs at different institutions often evidence considerable similarities. Some researchers see the provision of resources as a moral issue leading Thomas and Ermler (1988) to argue colleges and universities have an obligation to assist student-athletes with vocational, developmental, and psychosocial concerns due to the commitment they make to their alma maters. It appears many higher education institutions are indeed heeding this call to address the welfare of their intercollegiate athletes.

When examining the literature on support systems for athletes, Baillie (1993) classifies these resources into two broad groups, including those services addressing the

athlete's needs during his or her sports career and those dealing with concerns following retirement. Resources targeting academic support; career guidance and counseling; and social and emotional support intended to assist the athlete in his or her adjustment to transitional events during college (e.g. entry into college from high school, changes in playing status from non-starter to starter, etc.) address the needs of active college athletes. Additional support, such as career counseling services and other general counseling resources, can assist with postretirement concerns such as securing employment and coping emotionally with career exit from sport. Fletcher, Benshoff, and Richburg (2003) advocate for the consideration of systemic influences on the student-athlete such as individual differences, family and social networks, and socioeconomic and demographic profiles, when developing specific support services. Finally, researchers including Carodine et al. (2001), Keim (2004), and Constatine (1995) recognize the value of addressing the needs of student-athletes in a variety of contexts by highlighting alternative approaches to traditional support programs. Carodine et al. discusses ways to better utilize student affairs programs to provide for the developmental needs of college athletes while Keim presents a model for providing support services to community college athletes, a population often even less visible than their counterparts at major four-year college institutions. Finally, Constantine focuses her work on developing and evaluating a support group for retired female college athletes. There is little work examining what contributions support services and interventions make in addressing the needs of student-athlete groups outside of those commonly associated with male oriented, revenue-producing sports. This finding serves as a further call to conduct research on less

regarded student-athlete populations who consistently receive less attention in the literature, and perhaps in reality.

As the focus of this study is on the preparation of female college athletes exiting competitive intercollegiate sport, it is worth briefly noting athlete support programs aimed at preparing athletes for future transition. These broad categories of support services include: 1) counseling strategies and interventions designed to assist the athlete in coping with his or her preparation for retirement and with the period following the transition (Chartrand & Lent, 1987; Constatine, 1995; Dial, 1995; Wooten, 1994, 2005); 2) career guidance (Lenz & Shy, 2003; Nall, 2009; Perna et al., 1999) during both pre- and post-retirement; and 3) life-skill programs that include development of basic social skills allowing athletes to present themselves professionally to potential employers and to perform well in the workplace (Anderson & Morris, 2000; Meeker, Stankovich, & Kays, 2000).

Various support programs, such as those described above, may assist the college athlete in navigating effectively his or her eventual transition from sport. Counseling programs encourage athletes to exercise more ownership and control over their retirement experience by learning to set individual goals for the transition process and beyond and to discuss continuing attainment of goals during individual and group meetings (Constatine, 1995; Dial, 1995). Furthermore, research on career guidance for athletes highlights the benefits these programs have on the future life satisfaction of former athletes (Perna et al., 1999) as they are able to articulate a postretirement vocational plan clearly. The stability offered through career planning assisted athletes in more easily navigating the transition process. Finally, life-skills training involves helping athletes learn to leverage

many of the skills they learn in their sport including "commitment, goal setting, time management, repeated practice, and disciplined preparation" (Anderson & Morris, 2000, p. 61) to other areas of life following sport retirement. I next discuss studies specifically examining the transition experiences of intercollegiate athletes.

*Student-Athlete Transition*

In spite of the continuing social interest in intercollegiate athletics, Phillips (2004) reports that "student-athletes at Division I schools have more attention paid to them, yet seem more isolated than any other group in higher education" (p. 12). Petitpas et al. (2002) seem to validate this statement when referencing the current state of research on student-athlete transition, "although it appears that college student-athletes must adjust to several major transitions, these transitions have received little attention in the literature" (p. 137). When reviewing the literature on athlete transition I discovered a small body of studies specifically examining the adjustment of college athletes facing exit from intercollegiate sport (Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985; Hallinan & Snyder, 1987; Harrison & Lawrence, 2002, 2003, 2004; Hinitz, 1988; Kleiber & Brock, 1992; Kleiber et al., 1987; Lally, 2007; Parker, 1994; Snyder & Baber, 1979). Additionally, researchers note the vast majority of these studies employ quantitative methods (Harrison & Lawrence, 2003; Greendorfer & Blinde). As this study is primarily interested in exploring the experiences of intercollegiate athletes who are preparing for voluntary exit from sport, I have omitted from discussion research that addresses athlete retirement resulting from involuntary exit, due to sport injuries, discontinuation of an athletic program, and other like reasons, (Blinde & Stratta; Hallinan & Synder; Hinitz; Kleiber & Brock; Snyder & Baber).

*Greendorfer and Blinde (1985).* One of the first empirical studies concerned with understanding the career transition experiences of intercollegiate athletes was Greendorfer and Blinde (1985). This study used quantitative methods to explore a number of alternative athlete perspectives on sport retirement. At the time, scholars understood retirement as a negative experience. The goal of Greendorfer and Blinde was to examine the efficacy of alternative perspectives in redefining the way researchers viewed career exit from sport. This study included 2763 male and female athletes who competed in varied sports at a number of schools belonging to the same NCAA Division I sport conference. In addition, all study participants completed their eligibility during the period of 1970 to 1980. The researchers used survey responses from athletes to determine the efficacy of four alternative perspectives, which included: 1) continuity and continuation of behaviors; 2) retirement as transition; 3) shifting and reprioritization of interests; and 4) mild rather than severe adjustment.

Greendorfer and Blinde (1985) discovered sport retirement did not precipitate a complete break from the sport role. Approximately 75% of athletes continued involvement in informal sports in some capacity. Additionally, over 50% of their sample (and up to 81% of the male respondents) also reported they frequently followed various competitors and their successes and failures in the sport in which they previously competed. This continued participation in sport culture following formal transition lent credence to the researcher's first alternative perspective of continuity in helping athletes alleviate some of the challenge associated with sport transition. The researchers also found some evidence that sport transition experiences were not as traumatic as previously thought for a number of athletes participating in their study. One-quarter of respondents

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expressed happiness related to sport retirement while up to one-half of the sample expressed no feelings or being neutral. Other findings included respondents' perception of retirement as a transition, and not a discreet event, with their priorities beginning to shift away from sport during the later years of their career. This helped to explain their mild reactions to retirement and provided additional support for the other three alternative perspectives hypothesized by the researchers.

There are a number of limitations to consider when placing this early study of student-athlete transition within the context of current scholarship in the field. First, the quantitative nature of the study utilized a large sample that provided the opportunity for generalizable results. However, the inability of the researchers to study respondent perspectives in an in-depth manner prevents an understanding of *which* unique aspects of the athletes' experiences resulted in study findings. Recent research shows some athletes' do face adjustment difficulties when transitioning out of sport, which appears to contradict a number of findings in this study. Perhaps there were contextual components of the respondents' experiences allowing them to better deal with transition and to begin the process of shifting priorities away from sport prior to completing their intercollegiate career. These missed individual experiences may have been uncovered utilizing qualitative methods. Second, the authors developed a number of alternative perspectives they wished to prove or disprove which arguably influenced data analysis. Finally, the researchers suggest adjustment difficulties of respondents appeared to be mild overall, however, as many as one-third of study participants reported being unhappy or very unhappy with their retirement experience. The potential of having one in three college

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student-athletes dissatisfied with the outcome of transition is of considerable concern meriting further research.

*Kleiber et al. (1987).* Another classic study on student-athlete transition is Kleiber et al.'s (1987) examination of the quality of exit from sport and future life satisfaction for former intercollegiate athletes. Although the study includes some athletes who ended their intercollegiate sport careers due to injury, I chose to include it in this review since the effect of career-ending injury is not the sole focus. The study collected survey data from 427 former Division I college football players from the same NCAA sport conference. Data centered on a number of issues including the context surrounding exit from sport (e.g. involuntary exit due to sport injury, completion of eligibility), the amount of the athlete's playing time (e.g. starter, second string), and the level of recognition the respondent received during his playing days. Data analysis procedures included an analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine significant relationships among the dependent variable, life satisfaction, and a number of independent variables associated with the quality of exit from sport as mentioned above. Kleiber et al. found a significant relationship between suffering a career-ending injury and decreased life satisfaction. However, the authors found no significant relationships between future life satisfaction and either reported playing time or the amount of recognition received due to athletic achievements.

The above study on life satisfaction and perceived quality of exit for former athletes addresses a relevant concern in contemporary sport literature, namely how positive and negative experiences related to athletic participation and sport transition can influence the future well-being of college athletes. However, the study has limitations.

First, Kleiber et al. (1987) only surveyed male college football players whose experience likely varies considerably from that of other intercollegiate athletes (Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985; Lally, 2007). By examining the experiences of athletes in a range of sports, the researchers could have explored whether quality of exit had a similar influence on life satisfaction for other student-athletes. What is also of note is the authors only analyzed the relationship of a small number of predetermined variables related to quality of exit on future life satisfaction. Additional qualitative studies that seek to determine additional aspects related to quality of exit, based upon athletes' perceptions, could provide greater depth of information on the potential relationship between sport transition and life satisfaction.

*Parker (1994).* Parker (1994) represents one of the early qualitative studies in the field of athlete transition and utilizes a case study methodology to examine the transition experiences of seven former NCAA Division I college football players. Six of these athletes were from the same institution and a seventh from another institution. These former student-athletes completed their eligibility within three years of the beginning of the study and had not played sports for at least eight months prior to initial researcher contact. Additionally, athletes were not under contract, at the time of the study, to continue their sport careers professionally. Parker's findings included issues concerning: 1) the transition from high school to elite college football and the subsequent changes in relationships with coaches at each level; 2) the learning of behaviors not positively transferable to the "real world"; 3) power and control issues surrounding major college football; and 4) ways participants were experiencing post-eligibility life (p. 294).

The above themes represented findings centering on former athletes' struggles to adjust to life after their college sports. Parker discovered respondents "spent a great deal of time reflecting on the past" and focused on "perceived injustices, rather than about what was currently going on in their lives" (1994, p. 299). Six of seven athletes also reported feeling a "lack of control" (p. 299) during their playing days because coaches and athletic staff exerted a high degree of control over their former sport careers. Although a majority of athletes struggled with their transition out of sport, some expressed relief following the end of their college careers. This finding suggests the student-athlete may experience transition difficulties even when he or she expresses relief at completing the intercollegiate sports career.

Parker's (1994) study represents a formative attempt at initiating a qualitative shift in the body of literature on student-athlete transition. It is a study from which researchers gained a number of insights into the individual experience of former athletes and is one upon which future research should build. Parker included only male college football players in her study and, therefore, researchers should explore the transition experiences of other athletes, both female intercollegiate athletes as well as males competing in other sports, to determine how they perceive their playing days, relationships with coaches, and subsequent transition. In addition, it may be helpful to explore the apparent contradiction Parker discusses when athletes express relief that their careers are over while simultaneously struggling with adjustment to post-eligibility life. Scholars and practitioners require additional information on how athletes make sense of this phenomenon and how athletes experience sport culture.

*Lally (2007).* Three studies by Harrison and Lawrence (2002, 2003, 2004) as well as recent research by Lally (2007) most closely relate to the current study as they focus on the way in which intercollegiate athletes perceive impending transition from sport. These studies include the only research I was able to find on the pre-transition experiences of student-athletes. Instead of collecting data on sport transition *retrospectively*, these authors focus on a *prospective* exploration of student-athlete perceptions preceding formal transition. Lally chooses a phenomenological approach consisting of three individual interviews with each of six college student-athletes (three male and three female) at distinct points in their sport careers. The athletes selected for inclusion in the study competed at a large urban Canadian university, which the author describes as similar to the culture of an NCAA Division II institution in the United States. Athletes participated in a series of interviews that took place one month after the beginning of their final sport season; one month after the end of their final season; and, finally, several months (approximately 3-6 months) after exit from the institution. Lally found five of the six athletes interviewed reported a smooth transition out of sport. Respondents identified smooth transition as an ability to diminish "the prominence of their athletic careers" which allowed them to "more seriously explore and to commit to other identities" (p. 94). Athletes apparently began to shift their priorities away from sport in the final years of eligibility upon realizing they probably did not have a future in professional sport. This shifting of priorities in anticipation of transition assisted them in coping more effectively when the time came to exit the institution. These findings highlighting the relatively mild transition experiences and shifting of priorities of

intercollegiate athletes is consistent with previously discussed research by Greendorfer and Blinde (1985).

When exploring the transferability of Lally's (2007) findings the reader must consider a number of contextual factors in her research. First, Lally examined the lived experience of student-athletes competing in the athletic culture of a Canadian university. As the author herself states, this culture is similar to participation in Division II athletics in the United States. Expanding her approach with athletes in other divisions (e.g. NCAA Division I) is necessary to see if findings are similar or divergent. Due to the differences between athletic culture at Division I and Division II institutions it is conceivable that Division I athletes could perceive their career transition process very differently. Another notable finding is five of the six athletes in her study reported a smooth transition. Conversely, a sixth respondent actually reported severe difficulties with his transition, "the loss of the athlete role left a significant void in his identity and it took Mike about a year to establish a new sense of self, a year he described as very difficult" (p. 97). The presence of one struggling athlete among six participants parallels previous suggestions by Alfermann (2000) and Wylleman (1995) that up to 15% of athletes may ultimately struggle with career exit from sport. Therefore, it would behoove researchers and practitioners to continue to examine the individual experiences of athletes from a number of diverse sports and backgrounds to understand why some athletes are successful with transition while others apparently struggle.

*Harrison and Lawrence (2002, 2003, 2004).* Harrison and Lawrence (2002, 2003, 2004) sought to explore how male and female intercollegiate athletes perceived their future sport transition prior to exiting the institution, using student-athletes competing in

Division II sport. These studies employed a similar mixed method approach consisting of

qualitative interviews and a quantitative survey assessment. One data collection tool

utilized by the authors included a visual elicitation exercise. Harrison and Lawrence

supported the use of visual elicitation methods by "acknowledging the salience of cultural

artifacts and images in sport" and to "tap hidden emotions that might otherwise be

missed" (2003, p. 378). The visual elicitation tool included a picture and personal account

of a fictional former college athlete who had achieved successful career transition. The

authors were interested in determining how study participants reacted to the success of

the retired athlete and how his profile influenced the ways in which they considered their

own future transition.

Their first study involved 64 female respondents; the second study included 26

African-American male and female athletes, while the last study consisted of a sample of

one hundred forty-three male and female athletes. Based on their analysis, the authors

reported a number of themes including: 1) inspirational imagery validation; 2) academic

and athletic success; 3) classroom accomplishments; 4) family devotion; 5) life after

sport; 6) career path well planned; 7) positive role model; and 8) work ethic. These

various themes spoke to athletes' belief that seeing a former athlete who transitioned

successfully inspired them and having a positive role model during the sport transition

process is essential. Additionally, athletes recognized the importance of balancing

athletics and academics, working hard in the classroom, having adequate support

systems, and developing a plan for life after sport as being critical to successful

transition. The authors also found athletes did begin thinking about their impending

transition prior to completion of the sport career and participation in the study (having

access to the profile of a successful, albeit fictional, former athlete) provided additional encouragement for them to plan for transition earlier in their sports career.

Findings by Harrison and Lawrence (2002, 2003, 2004) provide a useful foundation for examining the pre-transition experiences of college athletes. Their interest in investigating when and how student-athletes begin preparing for sport transition, emphasizes an important distinction between the pre-transition experiences of athletes and the more commonly researched period following formal transition. By focusing on athletes' perspectives of impending transition, the researchers were able to examine the process by which athletes prepare for sport retirement and to capture potentially important aspects of participants' pre-transition experiences. The current study seeks to build upon the foundation laid in these previous studies by continuing this novel focus on athlete pre-transition.

While the above studies make important contributions to understanding the pre-transition experiences of Division II athletes, Harrison and Lawrence (2002, 2003, 2004) do not explore the experiences of athletes from other NCAA sport divisions. Due to differences between athletic culture at Division I and Division II institutions, it is conceivable that Division I athletes may have very different perceptions and experiences. In addition, the researchers chose to explore the respondents' perceptions of athlete transition based on reactions to a prompt, which included a fictional former college athlete identified as having successfully navigated transition to life after sport. Although the themes this research generated reflected study participants' reactions to a fictional profile, research focusing on the perspectives of athletes' own impending transition experiences may generate alternative findings.

*Summary of the Research on Athlete Transition*

The question of how the activities, perceptions, and experiences of student-athletes influence transition prior to sport retirement is virtually unexplored. By examining the experience of former athletes retrospectively researchers risk missing important aspects of the period leading up to formal transition, which may help to explain existing contradictions regarding intercollegiate athletes' ability to cope with sport retirement. Only four prior studies, (Harrison & Lawrence, 2002, 2003, 2004; Lally, 2007) sought to understand the perceptions of student-athletes prior to sport transition. How do athletes prepare themselves to cope with future transition? Do athletes spend time thinking about their impending transition? What steps can athletes take during their sport careers to help insulate themselves from future difficulties? These questions, and others like them, may produce new insights into the transition experiences of intercollegiate athletes.

Parker (1994) suggests, "former athletes have a lot to say and perhaps no one to tell" (p. 301). This statement becomes particularly profound when considering the lack of voice college athletes have in existing research. While current literature certainly falls short of providing real insight into the transition experiences of intercollegiate student-athletes in general, that failure pales in comparison to the lack of attention given to female college athletes. While studies including Greendorfer and Blinde (1985) and Lally (2007) provide evidence that many former college athletes successfully adjust to life after sport other studies such as Kleiber et al. (1987) and Parker (1994) suggest these athletes may face challenges both during and following formal sport transition. It is notable that none of these studies examines the experiences of female student-athletes as separate, and

potentially quite different, from their male peers. By presenting only aggregate findings of data obtained from both male and female student-athletes, the richness of the female athlete's sport experience and other potentially important discoveries are lost. The need to explore the diverse experiences of this unaddressed population is a challenge imminently suited to the spirit of qualitative research. The lack of attention given to intercollegiate athlete transition, the conflicting nature of primarily quantitative results obtained from those few studies examining this phenomenon, and the lack of consideration for the experiences of female athletes provide compelling arguments for additional research. Therefore, this study seeks to focus qualitatively on the lived experience of female student-athletes preparing for transition in an effort to expand our knowledge of this phenomenon.

*Chapter Summary*

Chapter 2 provided a review of the relevant literature beginning with the historical context of intercollegiate athletics and an overview of the contemporary college student-athlete. Next, I continued with a general introduction to athlete transition, a discussion of athlete identity and its relationship to sport retirement, and a brief review of support programs typically offered to student-athletes in transition. Finally, I concluded the literature review with an in-depth examination of scholarship pertinent to intercollegiate athlete transition followed by a summary of the literature and future directions for research. Chapter 3 addresses the intended methodology, study sample, and methods selected for the dissertation.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

*Methodology*

The methodology chosen for this study is phenomenology. Phenomenological research attempts to describe "the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon" through a "focus on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon" (Creswell, 2007, pp. 57-58). Phenomenology stems from an interpretivist epistemological perspective concerned with the idea of understanding or discovery, originally referred to as *Verstehen,* as opposed to the more accepted approach in the natural sciences of explanation or *Erklären* (Weber, 1949). This understanding comes from a direct and immediate engagement with a phenomenon that forces one to make sense of it without the understandings that are already part of his or her experience (Crotty, 1998). Of the various approaches to phenomenological inquiry, the one chosen to guide this study is Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenology. I chose this methodology because of its potential to capture the essence of experience from the perspectives of the individuals themselves. Another benefit of phenomenology is it assumes a different approach to inquiry than quantitative research, which is the dominant paradigm in the study of athlete transition. This distinction is important as a qualitative approach provides greater insight into the nuances of individual experience, in this case, student-athlete transition including how athletes begin to prepare themselves to leave sport. This is in stark contrast to relaying on

aggregated future outcome measures after formal transition has already occurred.

*Methodological Overview*

  *Philosophical assumptions.* Phenomenology, based on the writings of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), includes four philosophical tenets outlined by Stewart and Mickunas (1990). The first of these four tenets include *a return to the traditional tasks of philosophy*. Early phenomenological researchers were concerned with recapturing the Greek's understanding of philosophy as the pursuit of wisdom. These researchers thought modern philosophy had limited itself to examining the world in scientific terms and, thus, emphasized a stringently empirical, positivist approach to inquiry. Therefore, phenomenology is an endeavor more concerned with discovery of, and direct engagement with, a particular phenomenon rather than solely trying to understand experience through an empirical lens.

  The second philosophical foundation includes the pursuit of *a philosophy without presuppositions.* Creswell (2007) discusses this tenet as particularly important to phenomenology as the researcher must "suspend all judgments about what is real – the 'natural attitude' – until they are founded on a more certain basis" (p. 58-59). Husserl, Moustakas, and others who worked to develop ideas related to phenomenological inquiry believed the researcher should work as much as possible to approach a phenomenon "as if for the first time" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). This approach holds that it is possible, and indeed imperative, for the researcher to diminish the effect of preconceived notions or beliefs that may preclude his or her ability to discover the meaning individuals attribute to a phenomenon. Researchers are encouraged to practice techniques aimed at achieving this suspension of judgment, which I discuss in following sections.

The third tenet of transcendental phenomenology centers on *the intentionality of consciousness.* Husserl (1931) believed one could not view subjects and objects separately due to their intertwined nature and we, as subjects, always direct consciousness toward some object. This consciousness contains our lived experience, which, in turn, influences our understanding of an object or event. Therefore, one cannot understand a phenomenon or object independent from the reality of individual experience. This distinction separates phenomenology from empirical approaches to inquiry, which seeks objectivity in understanding an object or outcome. It is also an aspect that serves as a precursor to the final philosophical assumption of transcendental phenomenology.

The last of the four tenets, drawing upon insights from symbolic interactionism, is *the refusal of the subject-object dichotomy.* Simply put, transcendental phenomenology holds objects cannot have meaning beyond that attributed to it by the subject. There is no objective, inherent meaning contained within an object or experience. Instead, "the reality of an object is only perceived within the meaning of the experience of an individual" (Creswell, 2007, p. 59). This final assumption expresses the phenomenological stance that meaning flows directly from the perspective of those experiencing a phenomenon. Therefore, the researcher should work to suspend his or her previous assumptions of the phenomenon to allow for discovery of the reality of the individual participant's experience.

*Additional concepts.* There are several additional concepts the researcher must consider when utilizing transcendental phenomenology. These concepts include epoché, textural and structural description, and invariant structure. Husserl (1931) discusses

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epoché, also referred to as bracketing, as one strategy to achieve the necessary suspension of judgment in phenomenological research. In order to achieve epoché, the researcher should reflect upon his or her own experiences, making them explicit to both self and others so they are clear and, therefore, less able to influence the process of coming to know a phenomenon in an unintentional and subverted way.

Textural and structural descriptions refer to the products of the researcher's attempts to make meaning of participants' experiences in transcendental phenomenology. A textural description is an account of an individual's actual experience of a phenomenon. A structural description is a narrative that seeks to understand how individuals perceive their experience of the phenomenon. Once the researcher has developed both textural and structural descriptions, he or she creates a textural-structural synthesis in an effort to discover the invariant structure, or essence, of experience. Uncovering the essence of experience is the ultimate goal of transcendental phenomenology.

*The process of phenomenological research.* Moustakas (1994) provides a series of guidelines for transcendental phenomenological research in his seminal work on the topic. Although this approach shares some similarities with other qualitative approaches, it differs with its focus on uncovering the essence of group experience regarding a phenomenon of interest through a transcendence of preconceptions that may shape what the researcher thinks he or she knows of that experience. The original approach includes detailed, systematic instructions Creswell (2007) has synthesized and re-presented (p. 60-61):

1. The researcher determines if the research problem is best examined using a phenomenological approach. The type of problem best suited for this form of research is one in which it is important to understand several individuals' common or shared experiences of a phenomenon.

2. A phenomenon of interest to study is identified. In this case, the phenomenon of interest is the experience of female college athletes preparing for transition from intercollegiate sport.

3. The researcher recognizes and specifies the broad philosophical assumptions of phenomenology.

4. Data are collected from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon. Often data collection consists of in-depth interviews, observations, journals, and artwork.

5. The participants are asked broad, general questions focused on the experience of interest – e.g., *What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon? What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon?* – along with other open-ended questions.

6. The researcher engages in a process of data analysis consistent with the tenets of phenomenological research – I will discuss phenomenological data analysis later in this chapter.

*Appropriateness of Methodology to Proposed Problem*

Phenomenology is an appropriate methodology for this study for its ability to create a portrait of athlete experience from the perspective of those who directly experience the phenomenon of interest. Specifically, Moustakas' (1994) transcendental

variant is a strong fit for the study's purpose for two critical reasons. First, previous

studies (Dale, 1996; Phillips, 2004) highlight the potential contributions of

phenomenological inquiry in understanding the *individual experiences* of athletes that

previous methodological approaches utilized in this area of research often neglect. In his

examination of applying a phenomenological framework to research in sport psychology,

Dale asserts the methodology's potential to uncover aspects of the athlete experience that

might otherwise be unobtainable using more traditional, empirical methods. Furthermore,

in her study of the experiences of Division I freshmen college football players, Phillips

urges researchers to utilize methodological approaches emphasizing the athlete voice.

Since the focus of the current study is to investigate the shared group experience of

female intercollegiate athletes preparing to exit competitive sport, transcendental

phenomenology is a fitting methodology to guide this study.

     Secondly, transcendental phenomenology benefits the researcher interested in

examining an issue within the unique context of intercollegiate sport. Athletics is a potent

part of contemporary American culture and, as a result, we all have relationships with and

preconceptions about this enterprise. Transcendental phenomenology is less concerned

with these external preconceptions and interpretations of a phenomenon and instead seeks

to develop a description of experience from the perspectives of those intimately engaged

with it (Creswell, 2007). The highly politicized culture of intercollegiate athletics is one

in which a number of stakeholders (e.g. coaches, spectators, administrators) bring their

own concerns and opinions to the table. A researcher's ability to bracket out his or her

assumptions and preconceptions, as much as possible, is crucial to gaining an

understanding of the previously unseen experience of athletes preparing for sport

retirement. Coming to an experience "freshly, as if for the first time" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 34) is a hallmark of the transcendental approach to phenomenology and one that assists in achieving greater trustworthiness when examining the highly scrutinized and high stakes world of intercollegiate athletics.

*IRB Approval*

Before beginning the research process, I obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (Appendix A) from Oklahoma State University by submitting an IRB application and research plan. This approval ensures my authorization to conduct human subjects' research, specifically this study, and that subjects will be treated ethically and minimal to no harm will come to them because of their participation in the research. In addition, I obtained formal site approval before making contact with athletes participating in the study.

*Procedures*

*Participants*

This dissertation examined the pre-transition experiences of female intercollegiate athletes competing in NCAA Division I sport, specifically those athletes who had completed the final season of their sports career. Additionally, participants had no plans to continue formal, career sport at any level (e.g. professional, semi-professional, developmental leagues).

I utilized purposive sampling to identify and recruit study participants. Purposive sampling refers to the researcher's selection of participants based on a specific purpose or set of characteristics (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). By utilizing purposive rather than random sampling, I assured inclusion of those student-athletes most intimately engaged

with the phenomenon of interest. Since the use of purposive sampling is common for studies that seek to explore a phenomenon on which there is a lack of prior information, this sampling approach was a strong fit for the current project. Criteria for inclusion in the study included athletes who:

1. Were female intercollegiate athletes enrolled at an NCAA Division I member institution

2. Completed their final season of competition in intercollegiate athletics within the last twelve months prior to the beginning of data collection procedures (Spring 2009-Spring 2010).

3. Had no plans to compete in formal career sport at any level: professional, semi-professional, and developmental leagues.

The sample for this study ultimately included five female college athletes. I introduce demographic information, along with other details about study participants, in Chapter 4 through a series of narrative vignettes describing their experiences. The individual athletes served as primary sources of data. Data collection tools included a demographic profile, individual phenomenological interviews, participant-produced drawings, and bi-weekly journaling of participants' unfolding experiences. I also utilized a number of additional data sources to help supplement my analysis of athletes' experiences. These sources included observations of participants during the drawings exercise, viewing video clips of games, when available, in which study athletes competed during the 2009-2010 academic year, and both published and online information regarding the athletic departments to which athletes belonged. I included these indirect

data sources in my analysis in an effort to provide greater context for my understanding

of the experiences of the female athletes in this study.

        *Solicitation*. Working with athletic personnel at the study sites or through

participant referrals, I invited potential athletes to participate. The recruitment process

began with an e-mail distribution of written solicitation information (Appendix B1)

containing full disclosure of the study, including its purpose and methodology, as well as

a personal contact from the researcher. This personal contact consisted of being available

to potential participants to discuss study procedures, to answer any questions they might

have about their participation, and to set up a mutually convenient time to meet

individually with them to collect data. Finally, I asked each athlete who verbally agreed

to participate in the study to provide written informed consent (Appendix B2).

*Data Collection*

        Each female athlete voluntarily participated in a four-part data collection process

that included: (1) a brief demographic profile, (2) a participant-produced drawing specific

to her current or previous preparation experiences, (3) an unstructured, phenomenological

interview, and (4) a journaling exercise consisting of series of brief, open-ended

questions. These journal questions allowed the athlete to engage in continued reflection

of her pre-transition experiences as they evolved during the period between the initial

interview in March 2010 and the athlete's exit from her institution at the end of Spring

2010 semester (May/June 2010).

        *Demographic profiles.* Demographic profiles (Appendix B3) collected identifying

personal characteristics such as age and sports-related information as well as other details

specific to each student-athlete. The profiles assisted in creating a context for each

athlete's unique experience and provided initial insight regarding relationships with coaches, teammates, and athletic department staff as well as resources made available to her as she prepared for retirement from sport. Information from the demographic profile also assisted in highlighting points of interest on which to follow up during the unstructured interview.

   *Participant-produced drawings.* I asked participants to draw a representation of their experiences related to their preparations to leave sport and to interpret their drawings (Appendix B4). This interpretation provided the foundation for a respondent-led interview and allowed participants to have a greater role in determining content through a subsequent discussion of their individual drawings. I chose to utilize this method because it can elicit deeply rooted emotional and personal information from the perspective of participants that may not be readily apparent to the researcher collecting interview data (Curry, 1986). The ability of the drawing method to elicit the inner thoughts of participants, often directly related to their personal experience, make this approach a good fit for the current phenomenological study. Relying on this method, as opposed to utilizing pre-formulated questions based on my own assumptions of the phenomenon, allowed me to focus on the perspective of each participant with less influence from personal preconceptions and experiences. I retained all participant-produced drawings for inclusion in the study (Appendix D).

   Since the use of the drawing method is a unique aspect of the current study, I would like to introduce the reader to its previous and current uses as a qualitative research method. Visual elicitation methods have enjoyed a long history of use in social science research (Curry, 1986) being most commonly employed in fields such as social

and visual anthropology (Collier & Collier, 1986). Previous examples of visual elicitation methods have involved the use of photographs "to evoke thoughts, reactions, and feelings from individuals about some aspect of social life" (Snyder & Kane, 1990, p. 256). However, visual elicitation methods can also include a number of other visual media including artwork, audiovisual content, print, and, of greatest interest to this study, participant-produced drawings (Derry, 2002; Meyer, 1991; Nossiterman & Biberman, 1990). Studies such as Kearney & Hyle (2004), Vince (1995), and Vince & Broussine (1995) have also shown the promise of visual elicitation methods in surfacing data in environments where emotions may not be a widely accepted or visible part of daily activities. While emotions are a visible aspect of sport culture, there is arguably less space for expressions of vulnerability and uncertainty by athletes. The contribution of the drawings method to this study is the increased potential to tap into these emotional responses.

Although fields such as sociology and anthropology commonly utilize visual elicitation methods, it is a tool sport psychology researchers have largely ignored (Curry, 1986). This reality is somewhat surprising in light of Gonzales' and Jackson's (2001) acknowledgment of the prevalence of visual and cultural artifacts in sport. Furthermore, Hall et al. (1998) assert imagery use in the visualization of success is a common part of the training process, making it a familiar concept for athletes at all levels of competition. Recognizing the potential for visual-elicitation methods in examining the experiences and meanings individuals associate with sport culture, a growing body of research (Curry; Snyder & Kane, 1990; Johnson, Hallinan, & Westerfield, 1999; Harrison & Lawrence, 2002, 2003, 2004; Phillips, 2004) advocates the use of these methods when conducting

studies on sports-related topics. Most of this research focuses on the use of photographs to explore the perspective of study participants. Curry was one of the first authors to advocate for the use of visual methods in sport psychology and provided an example by exploring concepts of pain, violence, and injury through photographs with an intercollegiate wrestler. Harrison and Lawrence also used photographs in a series of studies examining contemporary college athletes' reactions to a fictional profile of a former athlete who had successfully transitioned to life after sport. Snyder and Kane and Johnson, Hallinan, and Westerfield also contributed to this area of inquiry using photographs to explore non-athletes' attitudes and perceptions of various college sports and the athletes who compete in them.

A recent study utilizing an alternative visual-elicitation method includes Phillips' (2004) phenomenological study of the lives of Division I freshmen college football players. She asked athletes to draw pictures of their experience competing in college sports. Phillips then used these pictures as an entry point for a semi-structured phenomenological interview. She argued for the use of drawings as a visual-elicitation method as she believed they allowed the participant to have a greater voice in the research process and provided an opportunity for him to drive the content of the interview.

In the current study, I also argue for the use of visual methods, specifically participant-producing drawings, as a tool for accessing respondent data that may not readily arise through the course of the standard phenomenological interview. In many cases, the interviewer may not capture important data simply because he or she may not know what to ask in order to surface key pieces of a participant's experience.

Additionally, deeply held values, beliefs, or emotions may be difficult to elicit if the respondent is part of a culture in which being open and vulnerable with others is not encouraged (e.g. a strict hierarchical organizational structure). I believe this method is a good fit with the current phenomenological study as it holds great promise in capturing the essence of experience for study participants based upon its previously discussed strengths.

*Respondent-led interviews.* Immediately following the drawing exercise, I engaged participants in an individual phenomenological interview of approximately 60-90 minutes. I asked open-ended questions which sought to explore how they prepared themselves to leave sport and allowed the athlete to reflect upon her drawing and her experiences with this phenomenon. Asking participants about their experiences can cause them to think more about their impending transition than they had previously. This effect can occur from utilizing interview methods in qualitative research and not only shapes aspects of the data obtained by researchers but can also prompt participants to continue to ponder the phenomenon in productive ways after they leave the interview. In those cases where it was helpful to use prompts to guide the interview process, I utilized broad, open-ended questions as a tool for developing rapport with the athlete, as well as keeping the interview centered on the phenomenon of interest. I present an example of these open-ended, interview prompts in Appendix B5.

*Journaling.* At the conclusion of the unstructured interview, I discussed with each athlete the bi-weekly journaling process, which consisted of four to five open-ended questions delivered in an online response format using the web based data collection program SurveyMonkey. Appendix B6 contains a representative sample of questions

from the journal response exercise. I encouraged participants to complete the journaling exercise by explaining its importance in capturing their evolving experience while preparing for exit from sport. I e-mailed athletes a link to the online journal two weeks following completion of their initial interview as well as two additional times during the Spring 2010 semester. I forwarded e-mail reminders to participants who did not complete the journal exercise when initially submitted to them. Just over half of the athletes participating in the study (3 out of 5) responded to the initial bi-weekly journal exercise when contacted. Two of five athletes responded to additional contacts. Journaling continued the data collection process following completion of individual interviews in an effort to capture the on-going experiences of the athletes. I surmise some athletes were not willing to complete the journal exercise as contacts came during a time when many participants were taking finals and completing other preparations for their moves away from the university.

*Trustworthiness*

One conceptualizes trustworthiness, which refers to the goodness or quality of research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), in a phenomenological study differently than in other forms of qualitative research. Adherence to Moustakas' (1994) guidelines for transcendental phenomenology is critical, and the current study took a number of steps to preserve trustworthiness by closely maintaining the spirit of phenomenological inquiry. First, I took care in developing a research question suited to a phenomenological approach. I also sought to recognize how the philosophical assumptions of the methodology informed my examination of this particular phenomenon. Researcher reflexivity, as required through the process of bracketing, is one specific example of how

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phenomenological techniques can support efforts at ensuring trustworthiness. By making my preconceptions overt to both self and the reader, I was able to achieve greater transparency and to reduce the influence of deeply held assumptions leading to increased confidence in the validity of the study. Next, I worked to identify potential participants who would most likely have intimate experiences with the phenomenon of interest and utilized a number of qualitative methods to gather detailed information related to those experiences. Finally, I closely adhered to all phenomenological data analysis procedures outlined by Moustakas including horizionalization, developing clusters of meaning, creating textural and structural descriptions, and finally synthesizing these descriptions into an invariant structure. I utilized techniques such as the construction of detailed narrative vignettes to enhance the ability of the study to capture participants' experiences. These various techniques provided opportunities for increasing the length of time spent with my data as well as allowing for greater immersion into participant experiences, which assisted in achieving a higher degree of trustworthiness.

Likewise, I also considered more traditional elements of trustworthiness (e.g. transferability, dependability, credibility, and confirmability) described by Schwandt (2007). I included a number of techniques in order to meet these criteria in an effort to increase the trustworthiness of the current project. The study achieved transferability through triangulation of the data. Triangulation involves utilizing multiple data sources, theoretical perspectives, or methods in order to check the integrity of the inferences drawn from data analysis (Patton, 2002). Dependability, a second component of trustworthiness, refers to the extent the researcher documents the process of research and maintains transparency. The use of an analytic field log, which I discuss below, allowed

me the opportunity to log insights and challenges during the research process providing for the creation of a living and evolving document. Next, I addressed credibility, which is concerned with the congruence between participants' views of their experience and the way in which the researcher ultimately chooses to represent these experiences, through a series of member checks. By allowing participants the opportunity to provide clarification on study data, I achieved a greater level of fit between the perceptions of the athletes' experiences and my representation of these experiences in the study. Finally, I achieved confirmability, or ensuring study findings are truly a part of athletes' experiences, by adhering to the tenets of phenomenological data analysis; this meant systematically interrogating findings and their related themes. Taken together, I believe these attempts at ensuring trustworthiness allowed the study to make a strong contribution to the current field of literature on intercollegiate athletics.

*Data Analysis Procedures*

The individual phenomenological interviews and on-line journals served as major sources of information on athletes' experiences and played the greatest role in informing the significant statements and themes generated from study data. However, to gain insight into study participants' careers in their respective sports, I also examined a number of multimedia materials related to their experiences. These resources included online video clips, when available, of the sporting events in which study athletes competed, as well as online and printed material concerning the institutions and athletic departments in which their experiences occurred. These multimedia resources played an important role in contextualizing my analysis. By understanding which aspects were and were not part of my participants' experiences I was able to reduce the influence of my own

preconceptions and to maintain openness to emergent themes within the data. I utilized these secondary data sources to inform my analysis and to develop the findings I discuss in later sections.

*The Process of Phenomenological Data Analysis*

As stated in an earlier chapter, phenomenology is both a philosophy and methodological approach to conducting research. In Chapter 3, I introduced a number of structured guidelines for data analysis developed by proponents of phenomenological inquiry. A more detailed record of data analysis procedures, utilizing a modification of Van Kaam's (1959, 1966) method of phenomenological data analysis, as described by Moustakas (1994), follows below.

Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Van Kaam (1959, 1966) method for phenomenological data analysis encompasses seven steps allowing the researcher to investigate the essence of participant experience from the myriad of data he or she collects. These seven steps, taken from Moustakas' work on transcendental phenomenology, include (pp. 120-121):

1. *Listing and Preliminary Grouping:* List every expression relevant to the experience (Horizonalization).

2. *Reduction and Elimination:* To determine the invariant constituents test each expression for two requirements:

    a. Does it contain a moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it?

    b. Is it possible to abstract it? If so, it is a horizon of the experience. Expressions not meeting the above requirements are eliminated.

Overlapping, repetitive, and vague expressions are also eliminated or presented in more exact descriptive terms. The horizons that remain are the invariant constituents of the experience.

3. *Clustering and Thematizing the Invariant Constituents:* Cluster the invariant constituents of the experience that are related into a thematic label. The clustered and labeled constituents are the core themes of the experience.

4. *Final Identification of the Invariant Constituents and Themes by Application Validation:* Check the invariant constituents and their accompanying theme against the complete record of the research participant:

   a. Are they expressed explicitly in the compete transcript?

   b. Are they compatible if not explicitly expressed?

   c. If they are not explicit or compatible, they are not relevant to participants' experiences and should be deleted.

5. Using the relevant validated invariant constituents and themes, construct for each co-researcher an *Individual Textural Description* of the experience. Include verbatim examples from the transcribed interview.

6. Construct for each co-researcher an *Individual Structural Description* of the experience based on the Individual Textural Description and Imaginative Variation.

7. Construct *for each research participant* a *Textural-Structural Description* of the meanings and essences of the experience, incorporating the invariant constituents and themes.

*Discussion of data analysis procedures.* I maintained care in following the above data analysis procedures for each of the various data sources. Participants' interpretations of their drawings, along with their interviews, were audiotaped and transcribed. I returned transcripts of these individual 60-90 minute interviews to each participant as an opportunity to complete a member check. Member checking is a way of drawing upon participants to corroborate findings and lend additional confirmability to the study (Schwandt, 2007). After receipt of member checked transcripts from individual respondents, I gathered all collected data (original interview transcripts, member-checked transcripts, drawings, and journal responses) and began the process of phenomenological data analysis. Responses from the online journal exercise also contributed to my understanding of the unfolding experience of study participants during the period leading up to formal transition and I included this data in my analysis as well.

Due to the emergent nature of phenomenological research, it is important to draw upon a process of open coding to allow insights from the experience of participants to emerge from study data. Using the process of horizonalization discussed previously, I conducted several rounds of open coding with each interview transcript. During this process, I viewed each insight gained from the data as having equal value. I continued the process of horizonalization with each interview transcript, allowing for the exploration and interrogation of different horizons of meaning until these important pieces of data began to coalesce into non-overlapping themes, which emerged as compelling or particularly relevant. These themes, or clusters of meaning, served as potential scaffolds upon which to organize continuing insights.

After determining a number of significant clusters of meaning from each interview transcript and journal response I then compared the various horizons and clusters of meaning obtained from the data of individual participants with others in order to piece together broader themes from group experience. In order to assist in this on-going process of meaning making, I exposed the various data units and clusters to a number of qualitative analytic techniques. Specifically, I developed narrative vignettes, intended to represent the experience of each participant, and included them with study findings in Chapter 4. Narrative vignettes allow the researcher to expand on particular clusters of meaning or important narratives that arise from the unique experience of participants. This interrogation of seemingly important concepts assists in analyzing the data in more in-depth and productive ways.

The purpose of analyzing various horizons and clusters of meaning emerging from the data is to assist in the development of textural and structural descriptions congruent with participants' experiences. I prepared a textural and structural description to convey the essence of the phenomenon of interest from the perspective of each individual participating in this study. These individual descriptions highlighted the experience of participants and aided in data analysis efforts. Finally, I utilized these textural and structural descriptions to assist in discovering the invariant structure of participants' experiences, thereby allowing the reader to grasp the meaning attributed to the phenomenon of preparing for career exit from sport. I present these various descriptions of experience in following chapters.

An important tool utilized during the data collection and analysis process was the analytic field log. In an effort to make this field log transparent I maintained a weblog

that was accessible by me, my advisor, and other interested committee members throughout the completion of this study. This blog served a number of important functions. First, the field log represented an on-going record to document the process of research and to provide a forum to process and make overt my inner thoughts and observations related to carrying out this study. Developing an audit trail for my research provided for increased transparency of the processes and insights into my personal experiences as researcher. This allowed for a greater level of trustworthiness in study outcomes.

A second function of the analytic field log was to allow for the process of epoché - an integral part of phenomenological research. Discussed previously, epoché, or bracketing, is the process of recognizing and making explicit the assumptions the researcher holds regarding the phenomenon he or she attempts to understand. The purpose of this researcher reflexivity is an effort to bracket presupposition. Bracketing assists in transcending previously held beliefs and provides the researcher with opportunities to discover the unique reality of a phenomenon from the perspective of an individual's direct experience. The use of the analytic field log is entirely consistent with phenomenological research and provides an outlet through which I was able to engage in the process of epoché in an ongoing way. During the data collection and analysis stages of this project, I examined my unique position relative to this project and highlighted how previously held biases and presuppositions influenced my ability to represent faithfully the experience of participants. The analytic field log also became an important data analysis tool as it served as a vehicle for meaning making and allowed me to record my emerging thoughts, struggles, and discoveries while moving toward completion of the

current research (Ely, 1991). After developing a textural-structural synthesis for each study participant, I then constructed composite descriptions of participants' experiences, or the essence of group experience. The horizons and clusters of meaning obtained from my data, as well as individual descriptions of experience developed, are included in Chapter 4.

Before concluding a discussion of data analysis efforts, I wish to point out one potential limitation of my analysis based upon the amount of time spent with study data. I completed interviews with study participants in March 2010 and submitted a final write up of my analysis to committee members in June 2010. During this time, I also received periodic updates from participants though the use of the online journal. Ideally, all analysis benefits from significant immersion in data; however, I discuss difficulties in recruiting study participants in Chapter 4, which limited the amount of time I was able to engage in data analysis efforts following completion of participant interviews. As phenomenological researchers often argue, horizons can never be completely exhausted regardless of the amount of time one spends analyzing data (Moustakas, 1994). However, revisiting my data in the future and probing for additional insights may provide an opportunity to extend the findings I present in the next chapter.

*Chapter Summary*

The goal of this chapter was to introduce a number of assumptions and procedures related to phenomenological inquiry and to support the alignment of this methodology with the current project. The chapter began with an overview of phenomenology along with its philosophical assumptions and guidelines for conducting phenomenological research. Additionally, I provided an outline of my intended methods including when,

how, and from whom I will collect data; ways in which I ensured trustworthiness; and the

intended approach for conducting phenomenological data analysis. In Chapter 4, I present

a number of important findings that resulted from data analysis efforts.

CHAPTER IV

DATA PRESENTATION

The purpose of this chapter is to present study findings following extensive qualitative data analysis. First, I reintroduce the concept of epoché, or bracketing, presented in Chapter 3, and provide examples of how this process appears in the study. Finally, I present findings from my data beginning with individual narratives, which provide the reader with greater context for each athlete involved in the study, and then move to a discussion of the various horizons, clusters of meaning, and descriptions of experience developed from study data.

*Pre-Analysis Bracketing*

Before beginning data analysis procedures for this project I engaged in epoché, also known as bracketing, which is an effort to make explicit the researcher's experience regarding the phenomenon of study. This bracketing of experience is necessary in order to transcend the biases and preconceptions the research holds regarding a phenomenon. Epoché is an important aspect of the phenomenological research process, which requires a good deal of researcher reflexivity leading to an overt acknowledgment of how personal experience influences the way one understands the reality of a phenomenon. This process of introspection is often challenging for the researcher as he or she may struggle to recognize the deeply held assumptions and preconceptions that shape his or her view of a topic. I first attempted to bracket my assumptions regarding the current study in my researcher statement in Chapter 1. However, before beginning data analysis I found it

helpful to once again bracket my experiences and make transparent my assumptions regarding athlete transition. This bracketing is particularly important in light of insights gained while completing data collection. As noted previously, I have prior experience as a student affairs professional as well as a strong desire to support the developmental needs of students. This experience influenced both my past work with college students and my current interest in researching the lives of student-athletes in transition. I am familiar with a number of common support services for non-athletes and through the course of my dissertation research, I learned of the variety of programs and services employed by athletic departments at the institutions of study participants. As a student services professional I expected athletic departments would be concerned with all aspects of athlete experience and thus would include some programs to address sport transition to prepare college athletes for life beyond sport. I looked for the impact of those programs, which I assumed would prepare the female athletes in my study to be successful in their launch from college to their lives following graduation. Although my prior experience with Bridget, which I discussed in Chapter 1, highlights her difficulty in dealing with her own transition, I still wondered how much of her experience was individual or if common themes were part of the larger experience of the female college athlete.

As I began the process of interviewing athletes for this study, I noted that participants exhibited some difficulty in answering my questions regarding their preparations for sport retirement. It felt as if my study participants and I were speaking different languages regarding their current experience. I soon realized athletes might not formally engage in any preparation for sport transition or, at minimum, the preparation experience occurred in unexpected ways. Although all participants were Division I

female athletes, and four of the five competed in sport at the same institution, they all experienced the process of preparing to leave sport in very different ways. What I realized after my exchanges with study participants was the idea that there would be some uniformity to aspects of their pre-transition experience was, in fact, an assumption—and a faulty assumption at that. Although each athlete competed in the culture of Division I intercollegiate athletics, formal institutional structures of support did not seem as important in defining their perceptions of preparing for transition as I had anticipated.

The realization formal methods of preparing for career exit might not be as important to the athletes in my study as more informal and individualized preparation processes was important in informing my perspective prior to beginning data analysis. This realization provided me with the opportunity to look past what I expected to find and to open my mind to what participants perceived as the most poignant aspects of their experience. By maintaining a greater awareness of how athletes' preparation experiences were different from what I had anticipated, I was better able to transcend my own biases and more readily access components of the experiences of study participants they deemed as significant.

*Findings*

*Individual Descriptions of Experience*

The study sample included five Division I female college athletes (four identifying as Caucasian and a fifth identifying as African-American) competing in four different sports – soccer, cross country, track and field, and basketball. Four of the five athletes attended a large public research institution in the southern plains area of the

United States while the fifth competed at a large private religiously affiliated institution in the Midwest. In addition, four of the five athletes completed their final season of sport competition within the last six months and were on schedule to graduate from the institution prior to Fall 2010. A fifth athlete, Dorothy (pseudonym), was in her first year of graduate school having completed her sport eligibility within the last 12 months. Significantly, Dorothy seemed able to articulate her experiences with sport transition more deeply and readily than the other participants in this study who were preparing for impending transition at the time of the study. This apparent difference in the ability of study participants to discuss their experiences hints at the influence time may have in examining the transition experiences of intercollegiate athletes. Additionally, two of the athletes, Beth and Sarah (pseudonyms), competed in the same sport at the same institution and were roommates at the time of this study. This reality is noteworthy, as their interactions outside of the research experience may have deepened their reflections on the phenomenon of transitioning.

Due to study-specific IRB concerns regarding participant confidentiality, I have not provided a detailed description of the institutions at which study participants competed during their intercollegiate careers. However, individual descriptions of experience for each of the athletes in this study do follow and serve a dual purpose. First, the narratives provide the reader with detailed information on each participant and help provide critical context for her experience. Second, these narratives serve as a data analysis tool, consistent with the steps of phenomenological inquiry discussed previously. The purpose of the narratives is to help explore the individual experiences of the athletes; as such, they provided critical information for the development of textural and structural

descriptions of experience as well as the invariant structure. The names provided for each of the athletes are pseudonyms.

*Beth.* I first met Beth on a quiet Wednesday evening in March. Beth was a fourth-year senior Caucasian soccer player who competed at a large public institution. As I waited for her in a conference room in an academic building on the campus of her undergraduate institution, I saw her appear, hurrying around a corner of the hall. With a sandy brown ponytail bobbing with the staccato beat of her steps, I observed Beth to be of average height and stature at approximately 5'7" tall. She carried herself gracefully with a certain bounce in her step that mirrored the positive attitude she later displayed in our conversations. She was dressed casually in a t-shirt, sweats, and tennis shoes. Based on my conversations with previous student-athletes I noted what appeared to be the quintessential college athlete garb.

Beth seemed more than happy to share her experiences in sport and her thoughts on upcoming transition; she stated that disengaging from her career in soccer in November 2009 was an opportunity to "start something new" by focusing on her life beyond soccer. She planned to attend graduate school in the fall and explained she realized early in her sport career that athletics might not continue to be there for her. Sport had always been important but academics found a place of equal importance in her life. She saw her practice of "making school and soccer a priority" as somewhat different from the typical college student-athlete and she proceeded to share a number of stories of peers who all pinned their hopes on a future career in sport. One example was her current boyfriend, a former college athlete who "only cared about baseball." She described him as one of the lucky ones actually drafted to play professional sport. However, she

recognized this was not typical for the majority of college athletes and if they did not make room for academics during their sport career then they would have little left after that career was over.

Although it appeared Beth generally had positive feelings related to her impending exit from college, there was still a sense of ambiguity associated with her comments concerning preparations to leave competitive sport. She reminisced on the fact she began playing soccer at four years old and had competed ever since. She described the end of her last season on the team and the subsequent time spent looking toward graduation as "bittersweet" and filled with both happiness at having time of her own and a sense of loss since she would never play competitive soccer again. She spoke of still going to practices to maintain connections with the team and sitting in the stands during their spring scrimmages and games cheering them on--often wishing she "could just have one more year out there". Beth's comments seemed to communicate that preparing to leave sport is "hard and it's not". Physically she communicated it is easy since she could finally put the demands of competitive sport behind her after a commitment of almost 18 years. Mentally leaving sport is "hard because it is something you have been a part of all your life". Soon she would have to move out into the "real world", without the constant support of teammates and coaches, and prove to herself she could succeed as an individual.

*Sarah.* Sarah, a Caucasian fourth-year senior soccer player competing at a large public research institution, was the second athlete I interviewed for this study. Sarah's personality appeared friendly and open and the attitude she eventually displayed in describing her preparations to leave sport seemed as lackadaisical as the laid-back and

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jovial demeanor she expressed during our interactions. I immediately noticed her quick, compact 5'6" frame and wondered if her stature played some role in her successful career as an intercollegiate soccer player. She too had played soccer since the age of four and had a long history of competition throughout her elementary and secondary schooling, as well as in club sports within her local community. In fact, one of the assistant coaches on her current college soccer team, who previously coached her club team, recruited her out of high school. Sarah seemed open to discussing her experiences as an elite level intercollegiate athlete but, as we continued with our conversation, I noted what appeared to be some difficulty in her ability to articulate her experiences concerning the ways in which she was preparing herself to leave college sports.

The experiences Sarah shared during our conversation seemed to mirror those of other athletes in my study. She spoke about encountering an immediate sadness when the sport season ended but she admitted positive feelings soon followed this initial sadness. She quickly began to feel some relief at the end of the season because she would be able to "have some free time" and to enjoy the last few months of her college career without the demands of intercollegiate sport. However, as she began to experience her life beyond college soccer she realized not playing anymore was sort of a "shock" since it was an aspect of her experience that was "such a big part of her life". She reported close friends, roommates, and family members were important sources of support and she described them as being "totally honest" and explained she could always depend on them to help her sort out many of the changes she faced in her life. Sarah also stated feeling like an athlete but no longer actually being one was "weird" to her as she was no longer part of the team. She would sometimes attend practices with members of the current team and

criticize herself for messing up while playing as competitively as she had in the past. She also felt the need to push herself in her personal workouts as if she were still participating in team workouts. She would think to herself she needed to "run more sprints and push herself until she was out of breath" because her own workouts did not tire her out as much as she was accustomed to when being pushed by team trainers. Sarah seemed to recognize her thoughts as efforts to reconcile her identity as a long-time college athlete with her life as a "normal student" as well as how she would eventually define herself following the end of her college career.

What particularly interested me in Sarah's experience was a number of apparent contradictions in the way she described her experiences leading up to exit from college sport. Sarah believed in the need to prepare oneself for life after sport and told me how important this advice would be to future athletes whose college careers would soon be ending. However, Sarah admitted to having no idea what she wanted to do when she graduated from college even though her graduation was less than two months away at the time of our interview. She told me she had not been looking for a job, she had no plans to attend graduate school, and she was not sure what jobs she was even qualified for with her degree. She thought she might stay around the university over the summer and help her former coaching staff with high school soccer camps to make a little extra money. After the summer, she could always go home and work for the retail business her parents owned.

Another potential contradiction arose between Sarah's perceptions of preparing to leave sport and her actual experience related to the number and quality of support services available to transitioning athletes at her institution. Sarah discussed a number of

resources available to retiring athletes such as career services, the athletic academic support center, and seeking out support from coaches, athletic administrators, and athletic academic advisors. She described the athletic staff as always happy to help athletes plan their future. Sarah mentioned how helpful these various supports could be and she would suggest athletes preparing to leave sport should utilize them. When I asked Sarah how much she took advantage of these resources she immediately laughed and confessed she had not used any of them during her time as an athlete. She did not see them as being very helpful to her and therefore did not seek them out. During the interview, both Sarah and I recognized the seeming contradictions in her statements and she would often laugh and explain those things were important, however, they just were not important to or necessary for her. Her perspective seemed to suggest preparing to leave college sport can be difficult but it is not something that is impossible. She saw the necessity of athletes taking responsibility on their own, doing what they need to do to be successful, and asking for help when they need to. I wondered from my conversations with Sarah if other athletes held similar beliefs that could possibly inhibit them from seeking out existing support services. Perhaps the best laid plans of athletic departments in supporting the needs of their athletes look appropriate on the surface but the students who most need their guidance may not benefit from this assistance.

*Lauren.* I met Lauren on a bright and sunny Friday afternoon after she finished her classes for the day. She recently completed her career as a cross country athlete at a large public research institution. Lauren, who identified as Caucasian, had flowing blonde hair and a tall, lanky 6' frame with long, thin limbs, which I suspected played some role in her success in high-level intercollegiate athletics. She greeted me politely with a soft-

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spoken voice and seemingly melancholy demeanor that could not have contrasted more strikingly with the warm and inviting Friday afternoon during which we met. Lauren expressed interest in my study and warned me that her experiences might "skew my research". She seemed open to discussing her time in sport and her impending transition; however, every so often I could sense what appeared to be a slight hesitation as she reflected on the range of her experiences. A few times during our interview, Lauren would tear up, as she appeared to contemplate the reality of future transition and the thoughts and emotions this experience stirred within her.

Lauren was a multisport athlete in high school who struggled with eating disorders and body image concerns. During her sophomore year of high school she gravitated toward track and field in part because she was a gifted runner but also because running allowed her to better control her weight in conjunction with her disordered eating. She excelled as a runner in high school and received a scholarship to move out of state to attend her current institution and compete as an intercollegiate athlete. Lauren reported body image issues continuing during her time in college. She also struggled with injuries throughout the undergraduate years due to nutritional concerns, and the demands college level running can place on the body. She red-shirted off and on during various semesters in order to complete rehabilitation regimens and to work herself back into shape so she could continue to compete at a high level. Lauren also expressed some difficulty in building close relationships with other members of her team as she saw teammates more as her competition in sport than as an available support system. Her team had also experienced a number of challenges over time including coaching changes and a lack of overall success when competing in the conference as well as nationally.

As Lauren and I continued discussing her experiences, I noticed what seemed to be sadness and feelings of solitude. She discussed her time leading up to exit from sport as tinged with "loneliness, uncertainty, bitterness, and dissatisfaction". Lauren reported feelings of dissatisfaction with her college career and a sense of having "unfinished business". She felt the weight of expectations from friends and family but more importantly her own expectations of what she could have accomplished. She still admits her struggle with body image issues and is greatly concerned with continuing a high level of fitness even though she is no longer participating in sport on a regular basis. She grapples with the way she and others hold her up on a pedestal for being a highly recruited out-of-state athlete and reported difficulty with seeing herself in a future beyond what she has known in the past.

When I asked her in what ways she is dealing with her journey toward a life after sport, she expressed some resentment with the athletic support systems on campus as well as disappointment in herself for not seeking out help during this time. She stated that as an athlete, you are used to having a "guiding hand". However, now she is no longer an athlete she has not really seen much assistance from the athletic staff. In addition, she felt some sports received more attention than others did and maybe if she was a "male basketball or football player someone would be providing more guidance to her". This perceived lack of support made Lauren feel as if she was on her own in figuring out what to do next in life, and this responsibility was often overwhelming for her. She had developed one close girlfriend who previously competed on the team and with whom she shared similar experiences. She looks to this young woman as a role model and professes to be following her example. Other than relying on the experience of this one friend,

Lauren reported having no idea what she wanted to do after exiting sport and expressed difficulty in seeking out help from support services on her campus. She likened herself to an "old dog whose time has passed" while those on the team and within the athletic staff viewed her as slowly "fading away". The period leading up to exit from sport seemed to be a challenging time for Lauren, fraught with uncertainty and trepidation. She appeared to struggle with personal introspection while learning to be happy with the person she will become after sport.

 *Dorothy.* I met with Dorothy, an African-American graduate student, at the end of March as she was completing her second semester of a master's program in education at a large public research institution. She finished her last season of intercollegiate eligibility in track and field during the Spring 2009 semester and decided to continue her education. While pursuing an advanced degree she worked as a graduate assistant in her institution's athletic department where she remained involved in the lives of undergraduate college student-athletes. She maintained an interest in world of intercollegiate athletics after completing her eligibility and could see herself in an athletic administration position in the future. She viewed such a position as an opportunity to use her education to continue to support the needs of her fellow intercollegiate athletes.

 Dorothy said she and her coaches had often described her as a hard-working, blue-collar athlete and this description appeared to mirror her physical stature and no-nonsense, straightforward attitude. I noted her compact, muscular frame, standing all of 5'5" tall, that likely contributed to her expertise in the hammer throw, a track and field event in which she specialized. She was articulate and engaging and seemed to care deeply about supporting the needs of female college athletes. I thought her personable

nature played some role in making her a successful graduate assistant in working with these young women. During our interview, I asked Dorothy to reflect on her experiences related to preparing to leave sport a year ago and to help me understand what this experience was like for her and other athletes with whom she works. Dorothy seemed happy to oblige and we began a lengthy discussion of her experiences following the end of her sport career.

Dorothy described her experience with sport transition as a time of great uncertainty about what she would do at the conclusion of her eligibility. She spent much of her time on the computer searching for jobs. She also explained that for her it was time marked with some discomfort as leaving sport created free time she "was not used to" as a former college athlete. Dorothy described her search for ways to "fill her time" and to become comfortable living as a non-athlete. For her this transition from college athlete to "average student" happened suddenly almost as if she flipped a switch. She described it is an experience, "that creeps up" on many college athletes and, by the time they realize they should begin thinking about a life after sport it is over and they have "little time" to prepare for that new reality. Dorothy reported the belief athletes dedicate themselves to their athletic competition and often times "they only think about what they need to do to be successful in their sport" leaving little room for any other focus.

Concerning her preparations to leave sport, Dorothy said she experienced a sense of having to move forward "on her own" although she did not perceive this as strongly as some other athletes in the study. Dorothy believed the responsibility for achieving successful transition lies with the athlete herself and not on other individuals within the institution. She admitted it would be nice to have a program addressing "the real world"

after sport but she maintained there are people willing to assist the female athlete with preparing for her transition if she will seek out that help and ask for it.

*Rebecca.* Of all the athletes I interviewed Rebecca appeared to be the most interested in my study and, in our subsequent conversation, seemed to be the most positive about her preparations to leave college sports. Rebecca, a Caucasian fifth-year senior, competed as a scholarship basketball player at institutions in two major NCAA Division I conferences. She began her career at a large public institution and, after her freshman year, transferred to a large private institution in the Midwest, where she remained for an additional four years while completing her eligibility. I met Rebecca just after lunch on a warm and windy Monday afternoon in March shortly after she had completed her morning classes. She had a stature one might associate with a female intercollegiate basketball player, which made it no wonder she was so highly recruited. Standing at approximately 6'5" with long, straight, blonde hair and a smile that rivaled the warmth of the day, she was a gentle giant with what I perceived as a positive and inviting personality. She seemed eager to talk about her experiences and said she had been looking forward to finding out what led to my research interest in female intercollegiate athletes.

What interested me most about Rebecca's experiences with sport and her views of impending transition was that she seemed to perceive it as such a positive opportunity. She described leaving sport as something "bright and not overwhelming at all" and sport had "been a way to help her to gain an education and to achieve her goals". She admitted some aspects of leaving sport were challenging but she never let those difficulties overshadow her drive for accomplishing her goals. She reported success in finding ways

to shift her focus away from sport at a much earlier time than did some of her other athlete peers. She attributed this to a sport-related accident during the third year at her current institution. While competing in a mid-season game Rebecca suffered an injury that sidelined her for the remainder of the season. Her coaches encouraged her to take some time off during the summer before her final year to think about her future and to decide if she wanted to rehab in order to compete during a fifth year. Rebecca ultimately decided to come back to finish her last year of eligibility but she believed the time to "sort things out" allowed her to emphasize goals beyond her sport career. She stated this realization allowed her to be better prepared to leave sport than many of her fellow teammates.

Although Rebecca reported her impending transition out of sport as mostly positive, she also admitted many aspects of her pre-transition experience were difficult. She shared her struggle to develop an identity for herself beyond sport even though she is committed to graduate school and a life as a future professional. She searches for ways to integrate the life she has lived for so many years with a new sense of self she has slowly begun to develop through disengagement with sport. She also experienced a sense of both "relief and anxiety" with having more free time and she continuously seeks ways to fill this time with other things. Finally, she wonders if she will be able to continue the close relationships she has with fellow teammates and how those relationships might change "when she leaves school after graduation".

*Horizons Obtained from the Data*

After thoroughly reviewing my various data sources, I engaged in a process of phenomenological reduction to develop seventy significant statements, or horizons,

consistent with phenomenological data analysis. The significance of these statements

stems from the degree to which they appear related to the phenomenon of interest and in

the promise they hold to unlock the researcher's understanding of participants'

perceptions of that phenomenon. When developing an initial set of horizons in

phenomenological data analysis, the researcher views all potentially significant

statements as having equal weight in the importance they might hold in providing insight

into the phenomenon of interest (Moustakas, 1994). I initially developed seventy

horizons from study data, which are available in Appendix C. I present these horizons in

their entirety to provide the reader with the range of participant experiences discovered.

*Important Clusters of Meaning*

The second step in phenomenological data analysis involves the development of

clusters of meaning or themes that further refine the essence of group experience for

study participants. Beginning with the horizons obtained in the first step of data analysis,

I continued the process of phenomenological reduction to determine which significant

statements seemed most relevant to participants' experiences. As a first step in

developing important clusters of meaning, I deleted overlapping or redundant horizons in

order to present the invariant constituents of experience, or those statements that appear

to represent most appropriately the essence of participants' experience (Moustakas,

1994). I next organized these invariant constituents into individual data units on index

cards and engaged in several rounds of open coding to gain a sense of how the various

horizons assisted in my understanding of potential aspects of participant experiences.

When engaged in the process of open coding, I attempted to sort seemingly related data

units into various categories. After several rounds of open coding, some themes began to

emerge as potentially more salient than others did. As I became more confident in the

relevance of emerging significant themes, I included several additional rounds of axial

coding. Axial coding is the process of relating codes developed through the data to one

another through a combination of both inductive and deductive thinking (Corbin &

Strauss, 2008). Building upon a thorough interrogation of the invariant constituents of

experience, I developed seven themes that emerged through several rounds of open and

axial coding. I present these seven themes, including associated evidence from

participants' statements, in Table 1.

**Table 1. Themes/Clusters of Meaning and Evidence**

Theme/Meaning Unit with Associated Evidence from Participant Statements

*Bittersweet*

- You're doing something your entire life and then it's stopped cold turkey. Literally you stop and you don't have any games and at the end of the season everyone's like, oh yes we have a break. That's how I was and now it's back where I should be playing again but I'm not and they're all playing games and you're just kind of like, ah man. My season's really done, what?

- I guess it's bittersweet. When you're in it you're like, ugh I can't wait to be done. Then when you're done you're like, wait. I remember my friend who graduated two years ago. When she was finally done she was like, oh my gosh I want to play soccer again. I was like really? I can't wait to be done. She's like, no just wait and I was like no, you don't understand. Then when I was done, I'm like, OK I understand.

- Before the season even started I was like, oh I can't wait until soccer's done. I've been playing it all my life. I can't wait and I'm going to have so much free time. Then soccer's done and I'm like, oh crap. I'm crying and then I'm like, OK well wait this isn't bad and then now it…sucks.

- I was kind of happy. I was like I can take a break but at the same time I was really sad because I'm not going to do that anymore.

*On Your Own*

- You're doing everything on your own and you've never really done it on your own.

- It just sucks if a person doesn't really know what they want to do and they don't ask anybody for help which is something that you can potentially see in student-athletes. They do not want to ask for help. They would almost rather fail than ask for help or just struggle on their own.

- Being a student-athlete and having so many demands placed upon your time you expect people to kind of guide you through those kinds of things no matter what and help you decide. I don't think I've really encountered that yet.

- If you look at the football program or something like that they're going to get a lot more guidance than someone like me. They'll sit there and tell you in your ear what you have to do as opposed to me. Yes, I've been a good student in the past. Does that mean I know what I'm going to be? Does that mean that I'm on the same path I was a couple of years ago? Hell no.

- On the soccer field when you mess up it's not as big of a deal because you have teammates or you have someone behind you. In the real world you work with people but you're more by yourself. In sport, you always had someone behind you. When you go somewhere else you're on your own.

*Being Part of a Team*

- I still go to the practices and stuff. I try to stay involved because I still like my team. I still like to hang out with them. I have good relationships with my coaches.

- I'd say my best girlfriend is probably the better go to source for all this stuff because she's been down the same road I have. I want to see how she's going about it and I am almost following her.

- Most of my good friends are athletes. I live with three soccer girls. Two of them are graduating with me and we've lived together since we were freshmen. So, we're going through the exact same thing. All of us. So, it's better for us to be together.

- I'm still friends with teammates and even though I'm not with them all the time I'm still really good friends with them. It's not that big of a difference right now because we still talk and we still hang out and see each other. Maybe it will be different when I'm gone and I don't really have the group to go back to.

- It's not just being friends its being part of a team. It's almost like a family with your coaches and the team and you guys stay together and you travel all the time and compete against other schools.

- My friends, my family, my coaches, there are a lot of people I talk to. I talk to my parents and try to get their two cents worth and talk to my friends and coaches about it. We're all so close. We've all been working together the past four years.

*I Will Forever Be an Athlete*

- I'm not an athlete per se. I'm on the roster but I'm not competing. I still identify as that selected group of people here at the university. I look at other people and they're just the average student and here I am a student-athlete.

- I should just be a good person and a good student. A regular, average student but that's not good enough. I still want to be part of some social tie and have a passion for fitness and athletics and stuff. You still want to be a part of that.

- Even though I want to go into therapy I can't ever imagine being called a therapist before an athlete. That's crazy to me because therapy is my passion and therapy means more to me than basketball at this point. Basketball is my past and therapy is my future but it's still hard for me to put therapist or future therapist ahead of athlete.

- It was an identity crisis because I'm still a student-athlete but I'm not competing.

- When I work out I'll work out like I should still be playing sport. I'll go for a jog and then I'm like, maybe I should do some sprints. You know, stuff I'm used to because I'm not tired enough. I should be more tired like with soccer when we would just run until we can't breathe.

- It's weird to say that I'm no longer a student-athlete because in my mind I'm thinking I will forever be an athlete.

*Free Time*

- When you're playing soccer you're like, I just wish I had free time but then after you're done you're like, OK I don't want free time I want to be busy all the time.

- I was like, oh my gosh, what do I do with this time. It feels so good but I felt like there was something else that needed to be done. I needed to be busier.

- I have a lot of free time on my hands now that I didn't have before and I thought I'd like it but I don't. I like it but you're sitting around and I have nothing to do. Let's just eat or something because there's nothing else. With soccer you're doing your homework or you're doing whatever you have to be doing and without it you're like, OK I did my homework. There's nothing else to do.

*It Creeps Up On You*

- I wasn't as focused on thinking about life after sports as I should have been because basketball was such a huge part of my life that it was hard to look beyond what it offered me.

- I don't think any athlete prepares for life after sport. That's why I said I was sad and then I was happy and then I didn't prepare myself that really in the end I'm not going to like it. I don't think you really prepare until it's done.

- It just creeps up on you and then it's like, what am I going to do and then it happens. I don't think athletes are able to think about preparing to leave sports because they really don't know what it's necessarily going to take.

- While I'm playing I don't think preparing to leave sports is a factor because you're just so busy with playing. You're concentrating on the team and the game.

*They Think They Do a Lot*

- I don't really feel like athletic departments do much. Sometimes they think they do a lot but they don't really do much. I feel there should have been a gradual program set up about reality about life after college.

- Preparation for transition is non-existent.

- I went into my mock interview last year and a career was the farthest thing from my mind. I got dressed up and I went in to talk to her. I had no idea what I was talking about. I kind of dreaded it. I just got done with practice. I felt gross and I was just trying to get it over with.

- There's a percentage of people who know what they want to do, people who kind of know, and people who completely don't know. There are people who really are not doing anything until April.

- Look at where all the money goes in athletics and that's where all the support also goes. I would say basketball and football. That's where you get your support with athletics and academics. That's where people get the attention and it really sucks.

*Textural and Structural Descriptions of Experience*

Once the researcher develops a number of significant clusters of meaning from his

or her data, the next step in phenomenological analysis includes a presentation of textural

and structural descriptions of experience. These descriptions assist the researcher in

developing an understanding of the overall essence of participants' experiences by highlighting *what* subjects experience regarding a certain phenomenon as well as *how* they perceive this experience. The goal is to develop composite textural and structural experiences for the group of participants before moving toward the final step of realizing the invariant structure of experience. The researcher achieves these composite textural and structural descriptions through synthesizing individual experiences of study participants and imaginative variation on the part of the researcher. This imaginative variation involves an effort on the part of the researcher to interpret an understanding of overall group experience beyond simply what each individual perceives (Moustakas, 1994). I present composite textural and structural descriptions of experience below which I developed from individual athlete experiences through the course of data analysis procedures. As I discussed in Chapter 3, the textural description of experience captures the essence of *what* study participants experience concerning the phenomenon of interest. The structural description of experience provides a framework for understanding *how* participants experience a phenomenon by making explicit the underlying structures influencing this perception.

*Textural description of experience.* Preparing for exit from competitive sport is an experience in which the female college athlete feels both relief and remorse. She is happy she no longer must endure the strenuous demands sport places upon her while also experiencing a sadness she will never again be a college student-athlete. This phenomenon results in a significant disruption of long standing routines and a search to fill a void with new purpose. She thinks of herself as an athlete but she no longer participates in the variety of activities that define the athlete experience. There are no

more early morning workout sessions, no one in the athletic department to report to on a daily basis, and no more conditioning drills or running sprints until she cannot breathe. She is no longer a part of the day-to-day experiences of the college athlete and must learn to live like the average student - her non-athlete peer. Her time is her own but even this can be unsettling because she is unsure of how to fill it.

Preparing for transition is a time of searching for purpose and moving beyond a life in sport. It is job-searching, resume writing, and deciding what to do with one's life when sport is no longer the focus. It is an unfamiliar experience when the female athlete must strike out on her own to stake her claim in the world as an individual when she has grown accustomed to having the support of others. Some athletes set goals for themselves and shift the energy they poured into their sport into achieving new dreams. Others begin to realize their focus on sport did not allow much time to think about what they would do in the real world until just a few months before they are thrust into a life after sport. It is a time tinged with hope and optimism as well as with anxiety and loss. Some athletes enjoy facing this new challenge head on, as it taps into aspects of their competitive nature and their unyielding drive to succeed. Others prefer to avoid the discomfort this change causes and avoid the reality of their fleeting sport careers.

Female athletes who are preparing to leave intercollegiate sport also reflect on the relationships they developed throughout their athletic careers. They search for ways to continue their familiar connections with teammates and coaches even as they are no longer an active part of the team. They seek out others who understand what it is like to be an athlete and who have shared similar successes and challenges. Some wonder why they had not developed stronger relationships with their athletic peers and ponder how

their transition experience might be different if they were closer to teammates. Many see support from their respective athletic departments shift to younger players who are still eligible to compete. These young women desire understanding, support, and the assurance they will be successful in their lives after sport. They work to succeed as individuals even though much of their familiar successes have centered on being part of a team.

Overall, preparing to leave intercollegiate sport is a bittersweet experience. It is full of conflicting emotions. Feelings of relief, sadness, hopefulness, and remorse permeate the phenomenon. It is wishing she could still be out on the field relishing in her competitive nature while also pinning her hopes and dreams on a future that seems far outside of her current reality. It is a time full of both opportunity and stress, a complex experience defying simple explanation. It is time of opportunities and new beginnings for some while others experience stress, isolation, and concern. All wonder what the future holds for them as they seek to forge a new identity in their unfamiliar lives beyond sport.

*Structural description of experience.* Several aspects of the athlete's experience influence *how* she perceives this phenomenon. The first of these includes disengagement with a closely held aspect of identity in order to make room for a new sense of self after sport. Athletic participation is a job for many student-athletes and this career has spanned much of their formative existence. A forced disengagement with a role they have known for as long as they can remember fills them with ambiguity. There is both relief and trepidation. There is hope and optimism for some who see the end of sport as an opportunity to forge a new self beyond college athlete. Others do not feel like themselves and struggle to forge any identity other than student-athlete. For these athletes there is a

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profound sense of loss while they struggle alone to adjust. This forced disengagement from sport participation thrusts the female college athlete outside of her comfort zone and tests her ability to make sense of her changing self beyond that identity to which she has so closely held.

Some athletes describe themselves as successful in preparing to leave sport. They say the key to this success is in developing a focus on something other than sport well before the end of the athletic career. This focus often centers on career or continuing education but can be anything that provides a target for a shifting focus away from sport. However, even those athletes who have decided on a goal beyond sport wonder if they can be successful in something else. They have always depended on others within their sport for support, especially those competing on a team, and in the real world one must depend more on herself as an individual. Those athletes who do not have the foresight to begin the process of shifting focus away from sport, express surprise by how quickly the end comes. They are encouraged by coaches, administrators, teammates, and family to focus on competing in their sport and once their careers are over, they have little time to disengage successfully from their prior life and to forge onward in a new direction.

Another aspect of the athlete's experience is the influence of relationships developed during athletic competition on her preparations to leave sport. Athletes spend so much time with fellow teammates, coaches, and athletic staff and these individuals become somewhat of a second family to them. Many athletes describe their fellow teammates as some of the closest friends they will ever have because they have shared common successes and challenges and have made many of the sacrifices necessary for competing in high level Division I intercollegiate sport. They relate to this sport family

more strongly than they ever could to their average student peers. The female athlete has depended so completely on her sport family that she experiences a fear leaving sport will come between these relationships she so cherishes. She works to maintain her connections with former teammates before she graduates but wonders if things will be different once she leaves the college environment. Although the struggle to maintain close relationships with fellow teammates can be of great concern to the female athlete, they still serve as important pillars of support as she faces impending transition. For those female athletes who were not able to develop close-knit relationships with teammates there is often a sense of loneliness, isolation, and regret leading up to transition. These athletes struggle as they search for others who can understand their experience and are willing to support them as they work to develop a new place for themselves in the real world.

Finally, female athletes preparing for retirement must also deal with the reality of the shifting focus of others away from their own needs as they end their playing careers. As college student-athletes, these women become accustomed to having a variety of resources and support services provided to them to help keep their attention on sport and to allow them to be as successful as possible while competing. They expect to have access to more services than the typical college student and appreciate this assistance as they work to balance the various physical, academic, and social demands placed on them as intercollegiate athletes. However, after their sport careers are over some begin to perceive themselves as fading away and see new recruits and up-and-coming stars receive the support and attention to which they grew accustomed. Coaches and athletic staff must begin to focus on the next season and this sometimes causes the retiring female athlete to

feel left out or forgotten. She is used to receiving guidance as an eligible college athlete and she expects to receive this guidance as she enters her new life after sport. She realizes this time the guidance may not come and she must decide to either take responsibility to move forward and seek out assistance as an individual or to retreat into herself and do the best she can with impending transition on her own. Some female athletes wish they had been better prepared for the reality of life after sport but they are not and they resolutely move forward with their lives as best they can. Others anticipate the helping hand they learned to depend on and may leave their undergraduate careers still unable to see clearly what their future holds.

*Invariant Structure*

The final step of phenomenological data analysis includes the development of a textural-structural synthesis revealing the invariant structure or overall essence of experience regarding how participants experience a particular phenomenon. This essence of experience provides a framework for understanding how a certain group experiences a phenomenon, which, in the case of this study, is preparing for exit from intercollegiate sport. Since the invariant structure closely relates to the study's central research question and an outcome of the analysis process, I will present it in the final chapter where I engage in a detailed discussion of study findings.

*Results from Drawing Method*

Before concluding this chapter, I also want to present a brief overview of the drawing method utilized in this study. I used participant-produced drawings as a data elicitation tool as well as a method to guide content for the phenomenological interviews

conducted with each athlete. I present the individual drawings produced by study participants, along with their associated descriptions, in Appendix D.

After providing directions for the drawing method, I waited for each participant to finish her drawing without interruption while I looked on. Overall, the five student-athletes in the study readily engaged in the drawing exercise with three participants exhibiting a slight initial hesitation mainly centering on their professed lack of artistic ability. All were willing to draw their experiences after my initial request and each appeared to take great care in completing their drawings. The athletes appeared thoughtful in selecting colors for the various images each created and took a good deal of time in deciding among the markers provided. Athletes spent an average of 10 minutes reflecting on their experiences while creating their drawings and the exercise lasted for as long as 20 minutes for one athlete. At times, I observed participants giggling or laughing as they drew various figures. Two of the athletes, who were both soccer players, took approximately 10 minutes to complete their drawings and appeared to grow bored with the exercise after having participated for the 10-minute period. These two athletes abruptly concluded their drawings after approximately ten minutes with one of the two stating she was finished because "she got tired of drawing". The other three athletes seemed to maintain an engagement with the exercise until they appeared satisfied with their completed drawings. Two of these three athletes maintained a prolonged engagement with the drawing exercise for approximately 15 minutes while the third continued to draw for almost 20 minutes.

All of the athletes stated they were surprised when I asked them to draw a picture as part of the research interview process. Each said they thought it was somewhat funny

and they were not sure "where I was going" with the pictures. They also wondered whether they would have a chance to explain what they had drawn. Two of the athletes reported they enjoyed the drawing exercise because they "liked to draw and color" and that "it was easy to express myself". When asked if any elements of their drawings surprised them, all of the athletes said they did not. However, two of the five athletes professed that certain images contained in their drawings represented experiences they had not thought about "in a while". One of these experiences centered on various situations that helped one athlete decide on a career path following completion of her sport. Another discussed how expectations from friends and family at home had a great deal of influence on her thoughts about life after sport.

Overall, I found the drawing exercise helpful in surfacing pertinent data related to the pre-transition experiences of athletes in this study. Their drawings provided an avenue to explore contextual and emotional data of which I may not have been aware from my position as an outsider to college sport culture. I would also point to another success of the drawing exercise by citing the two participants who stated their drawings triggered aspects of experience even they had not thought about "in a while". Findings from a number of previous studies utilizing this method (Vince, 1995; Vince & Broussine, 1996; Zubroff, 1988) support the ability of participant-produced drawings to serve as a useful data elicitation tool. Another noteworthy characteristic of the exercise is all study participants readily drew pictures with little resistance after I asked them to do so. It is worth noting the success of the drawing exercise with the student-athlete population in my study in light of previous literature, which discusses the drawing method as having a range of success with varying populations (Derry, 2002; Kearney,

2002; Meyer, 1991; Nossiter & Biberman, 1990). The fact athletes in this study easily

engaged in the activity could indicate it as a useful tool for use in future studies with

similar groups, bolstering evidence from sport psychology literature that visual imagery

is a common and accepted element of the competitive athlete's experience (Mack, Paivio,

and Hausenblaus, 1998). Future research should explore the use of drawings, as well as

other alternative visual and creative arts methods, as they could prove to be a potentially

productive tool in investigating the experience of various intercollegiate athlete

populations.

*Chapter Summary*

The purpose of this chapter was to present a number of findings that emerged

from the analysis of my data. Initially, I engaged in a second attempt at bracketing before

examining the data in an effort to explore further my biases and the perspectives that led

me to this research. By doing so, I was better able to maintain openness to emergent

themes and to transcend potential barriers to insight that might occur due to personal

assumptions regarding sport transition. Next, I presented a series of narrative vignettes

for each athlete along with a number of significant horizons and important clusters of

meaning developed through the process of phenomenological reduction. Following these

significant statements and themes, I constructed textural and structural descriptions of

experience ultimately leading to the revelation of an invariant structure or essence of

experience for Division I female athletes preparing for exit from intercollegiate sport.

Finally, I briefly reported a number of findings related to the drawing method used in this

study. In the next chapter, I will discuss the relevance of findings in light of current

literature and theory; outline the contributions of these findings to my central research

question, including a presentation of the invariant structure; and highlight potential

limitations of this research and future directions for inquiry.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The intent of this final chapter is to discuss study findings, presented in Chapter 4, in light of relevant scholarship within sport psychology and athlete transition. I first examine how insights from participants' experiences assist in answering the study's central research question. Next, I present a discussion of study findings and highlight their linkages to contemporary research. Following this discussion of findings, I then propose a theoretical framework I believe has great potential in assisting future researchers and practitioners in making sense of the transition experiences of college athletes. Finally, I end the chapter by highlighting study limitations and directions for future research along with a summary of the study and conclusions regarding research, theory, and practice.

*Overview of Primary Research Question*

In Chapter 1, I posited one overarching research question, *What is the lived experience of the Division I female intercollegiate athlete as she prepares for transition from sport?* This question is consistent with a phenomenological approach and guides the development of a broad understanding of the experience of Division I female intercollegiate athletes preparing to leave sport. From the perspective of transcendental phenomenology, one reaches the answer to this question by discovering the invariant structure or essence of group experience for all study participants (Moustakas, 1994). I

discussed the process by which the researcher arrives at this culmination of his or her

data in the previous chapter and I now wish to present this invariant structure to the

reader as an effort to answer the central research question of the dissertation and provide

a foundation for further discussion.

*Invariant Structure*

Preparing for life after sport is to experience ambiguity. It is a time of both great

challenge and great opportunity. The intercollegiate female athlete knows the end of her

sport career may eventually come but the suddenness of its conclusion still often feels

surprising. The end of her final season is a major milestone in this phenomenon, as she

must stop "cold turkey" an endeavor that has likely defined her life since early in her

formative years. She immediately experiences sadness when her sport career has finally

ended but also a sense of relief she must no longer deal with the many demands sport has

required of her. Instead of early morning workouts, exhausting practices, and the

whirlwind schedule associated with intercollegiate sport, she looks forward to enjoying

more time with friends and family and relishing every moment of her final months as an

"average student". As she experiences this life after sport the sense of ambiguity grows

and she feels torn between who she has always been and who she is now - no longer a

competitive college athlete. Disengagement from sport thrusts the athlete into a new and

unfamiliar world. There is a sense of both discomfort and excitement as she looks toward

her long-term goals while still navigating the unfamiliarity of her new day-to-day

experiences. She wishes she could have "one more year" to compete but also realizes she

must continue her journey toward a life beyond sport. The familiar and unfamiliar

permeate the athlete's preparations for sport retirement. It is a time marked by anxiety

and hopefulness and a desire to channel the lessons learned in sport to success in life after college. It is learning to reconcile how she has long identified herself with who she is when sport is no longer the central focus of her life. Will she choose to leave all aspects of her former life behind and define herself in a completely new way? Is there room to incorporate aspects of her former athletic identity into a new sense of self? The female college athlete experiences a sense of loss associated with the end of her sport career and wonders if her new life as a "regular student" is enough.

Another aspect of preparing for sport transition is reflecting on the importance of relationships developed over the course of a sports career. Many athletes cherish the close connections they made with teammates and see them as "some of the closest friends they will ever have". These relationships serve as important sources of support for the athlete as she faces impending exit from sport. Some of her peers are going through the same experiences she is and they serve as critical partners in navigating their shared experience. Other teammates continue to compete on the team and they provide the former athlete with a continuing connection to her previous life in sport. They carry on the former athlete's legacy and help keep alive her prior contributions to the team. These relationships often serve to help soften the blow of leaving sport and provide a way for the retiring athlete to return to her former life, if only briefly, as she learns to deal with what it means to no longer be an athlete.

Some athletes struggle to develop close relationships with their teammates and this reality appears to have important consequences for their retirement experiences. Having few fellow teammates to turn to as one prepares for a future life beyond sport can create feelings of "bitterness and loneliness" as the athlete realizes she has little help in

making sense of her new identity. She desperately yearns for a confidant who understands what she is going through and perceives a sense of being "lost and alone" as time carries her closer to the end of her college career.

Finally, female athletes preparing to leave sport note the focus of athletic staff visibly shift to teammates who are still competing in sport. Some athletes perceive themselves as "slowly fading away" and feel forced to step aside so current athletes can reap the benefits they once experienced. She is accustomed to having the "guiding hand" of the athletic department but she finds that, after she is no longer an eligible athlete, this support quickly slips away. She struggles to complete many of her final preparations to leave sport on her own. This can be challenging for the female athlete, as the feeling of being "on your own" is something she seldom experienced during her career as a competitive intercollegiate athlete. Some athletes channel their competitive nature into conquering this new challenge. They make plans on their own and actively seek out the assistance of others when they believe it is necessary. Others continue to wait for the assistance they have come to expect as they struggle to deal with the reality of being no longer a part of the world they knew so well.

<center>*Discussion of Study Findings*</center>

*Significant Themes*

I presented a number of significant themes in Chapter 4, which emerged from participant- produced drawings, phenomenological interviews, and journal responses. In this section, I revisit these significant themes, as well as a number of additional findings, in order to frame them within the context of existing literature. By relating these findings

to contemporary research, the contributions they make to this area of scholarship are more readily apparent.

*Bittersweet.* The theme of bittersweet was a prominent one for the female athletes in this study as they considered their experiences related to leaving competitive sport. Four of the five participants associated feelings of both sadness and relief with the end of their sport careers.

"I was kind of happy. I was like I can take a break but at the same time I was really sad because I'm not going to do that anymore".

"I guess it's bittersweet. When you're in it you're like, ugh I can't wait to be done. Then when you're done you're like, wait".

Their sadness stemmed from the realization their sport careers were over and they would never again participate in sport as a competitive intercollegiate athlete. A sense of relief and happiness soon replaced this sadness, as the athlete was no longer required to deal with the demands placed upon her by formal sports participation. However, all athletes in this study later reported re-experiencing some feelings of sadness once the initial novelty of exiting sport passed.

Much of the literature on athlete transition reports conflicted feelings related to career exit from sport. This apparent ambiguity concerning athletes' perceptions of their retirement experiences led scholars to question the effect of transition on athletes at all levels. As discussed in previous chapters, many researchers found that athletes report only minor, if any, difficulties with their adjustment to life following competitive sport (Allison & Meyer, 1988; Baillie, 1992; Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985; Swain, 1991; Webb

et al, 1998). In fact, findings from a few authors (Lally, 2007; Parker, 1994) suggest some intercollegiate athletes express feelings of relief at moving beyond college sport and often begin to set post-retirement goals early in their intercollegiate careers. These researchers point to evidence supporting the idea athletes face no more significant challenges when transitioning out of sport than their non-athlete peers when facing other normative, or expected, life transition events.

However, a number of other scholars (Baillie, 1993; Baillie & Danish, 1992; Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993; Hallinan & Snyder, 1987; Murphy, 1994, Ogilvie & Howe, 1986) argue athletes may indeed experience adjustment difficulties when facing retirement from sport. Furthermore, some findings suggest as many as 15% of athletes at all levels, including intercollegiate athletes, do ultimately experience severe anxiety and adjustment difficulties at the end of their athletic careers (Wylleman, 1995). The feelings of ambiguity (e.g. anxiety, relief) reported by study participants, seems to provide some insight regarding the apparent contradiction highlighted in prior literature. Namely, a relief that the demands of sport are over and a sense of hope regarding new future opportunities beyond sport often mark the period leading up to transition. Although the athletes in this study appear to associate a positive perspective with some aspects of future sport transition, positive aspects of impending change can also spark feelings of anxiety and trepidation when the reality of career termination looms ahead. Prior studies of human change in other fields, including those in organizational change literature, suggest transitional events can often create stress for subjects whether they perceive them as positive or negative (Bridges, 2003; Kearney, 2009).

*On your own.* A majority of athletes in the study reported feeling on their own when engaging in preparations for leaving sport. These feelings resulted from one of two perceptions: a perceived individual responsibility to do so or because the athlete felt as if she was not receiving the guidance she expected.

> "It goes all the way back to you don't have someone telling you what to do. You just have to do it. You have to be mature. You have to mature a lot when you're done with soccer".

> "Being a student-athlete and having so many demands placed upon your time you expect people to kind of guide you through those kinds of things no matter what and help you decide. I don't think I've really encountered that yet".

Those athletes who believed in an individual responsibility to engage in preparing for a life after sport (e.g. Beth, Sarah, & Rebecca) made a decision at an early stage in their athletic careers to focus on alternative goals beyond sport competition. These participants saw themselves as able to achieve future goals without much assistance from institutional support staff. Beth and Sarah decided to focus on goals beyond sport after realizing a professional soccer career was likely out of their grasp. Rebecca reported having some time away from basketball to think about her future while recovering from a sport-related injury in the off-season.

The other two athletes in the study, Lauren and Dorothy, expressed greater difficulty in preparing for sport retirement on their own and stated they could have benefited from additional help from institutional officials. This experience of being *on your own* was especially difficult for Lauren:

If you look at the football program or something like that, they're going to get a

lot more guidance than someone like me. They'll sit there and tell you in your ear

what you have to do as opposed to me. Yes, I've been a good student in the past.

Does that mean I know what I'm going to be? Does that mean that I'm on the

same path I was a couple of years ago? Hell no.

Although this idea of being on your own affected each participant differently, all reported

some aspect of this finding as part of their pre-transition experience. Differences in how

study participants perceived this theme stemmed from whether the decision to move

forward independently was a conscious choice or whether the athlete perceived dealing

with future transition in isolation as something forced upon her. In addition, athletes'

individual beliefs about their capability to navigate the impending change event seemed

to moderate the influence of feeling *on your own* experienced by each study participant.

Current literature does not specifically address the perception of athletes' feelings

of isolation when preparing for exit from intercollegiate sport. One reason for this is the

vast majority of athlete transition research focuses on athlete experience *after* formal

career exit by examining quantitative outcome measures such as perceived life

satisfaction and career success. This focus on quantitative studies leads to a lack of

research exploring the individual narratives and perceptions of former athletes. I could

find only three prior studies (Harrison & Lawrence, 2002, 2003, 2004) specifically

targeting the pre-transition experiences of intercollegiate athletes. However, these studies

centered on the perceptions of college student-athletes regarding the successful transition

of a *fictional* athlete profile rather than their own

There is no prior literature addressing the theme discussed above and, as such, this finding adds another layer to our efforts to understand student-athlete transition. The current study draws attention to the experience of many athletes who feel they must deal with the challenges of transition on their own and highlights how some athletes appear to be more successful than others at coping with this change. Although there is no research specifically addressing this finding, there is the potential to draw upon related research on athlete experience to help explore the concept of being *on your own*. First, the idea that some athletes develop an overinflated sense of accomplishment and confidence in their abilities (Parham, 1993) could help explain why a few of the athletes in this study saw preparing for sport transition as an individual responsibility. Many college athletes are continually encouraged to strive for the highest achievements in their sport. Because they are "socialized to achieve," one might expect athletes to carry this competitiveness into their lives after sport, which includes their intended preparations for eventual retirement. Instead of seeking assistance from existing institutional support structures, some athletes in this study seemed to perceive their journey toward sport retirement as their "own responsibility." This finding may be a result of a felt individual drive to succeed developed from prolonged engagement in individual or team sports.

Another aspect of sport experience that may have some relationship to being *on your own*, involves the benefits many athletes receive from their respective institutions and athletic departments beyond what non-athlete students typically experience. Previously discussed studies highlight the types of support services offered to intercollegiate athletes (Carodine, Almond, & Gratto, 2001; Chartrand & Lent, 1987; Denson, 2002; Goral, 2005; Keim, 2004; Nall 2009). Several participants commented on

their athletic departments "giving them what they needed to stay focused on and be successful in their sport". Due to the number of benefits bestowed on college athletes during their playing days, a few participants reported an assumption that athletic departments would continue to support them in their transition after the conclusion of the sport career. However, these athletes stated feeling as if they had to deal with the challenges of preparing for transition on their own without the knowledge of how to do so without the athletic support systems they had previously taken for granted:

"You're doing everything on your own and you've never really done it on your own".

"It just sucks if a person doesn't really know what they want to do and they don't ask anybody for help…they would almost rather fail than ask for help or just struggle on their own".

A few participants seemed unsure of how to best deal with the challenges associated with impending transition and longed for the support they received as competitive athletes. This finding could help explain why some participants expressed feeling as if they were on their own as they contemplated their future beyond intercollegiate sport.

*Being part of a team.* All athletes in the study discussed the relationships, both positive and negative, they formed with friends, family, members of their athletic staffs, and especially teammates. In addition, they explained how these relationships often developed through their close associations with fellow athletes during sport competition. Many of these team relationships served as sources of support as they prepared to leave their careers in intercollegiate sport:

"I still hang out with my teammates and those girls are some of the closest friends I'll ever have because we connect and we understand each other and we've experienced the same things".

"It's not just being friends its being part of a team. It's almost like a family with your coaches and the team and you guys stay together and you travel all the time and compete against other schools".

These close relationships appear to be important to athletes facing impending transition as they provide opportunities for sharing a common experience, having others provide feedback on problems and ideas related to preparations for sport retirement, and for developing networks to help achieve future goals. Several athletes suggested these relationships played a significant role in helping them cope with the reality of change following the end of their sport careers:

"I talk to my parents and try to get their two cents worth and talk to my friends and coaches about it. We're all so close. We've all been working together the past four years".

Athletes also appeared to show some concern that leaving teammates behind after college might have some impact on these relationships and their own future as an individual:

I'm still friends with teammates and even though I'm not with them all the time I'm still really good friends with them. It's not that big of a difference right now because we still talk and we still hang out and see each other. Maybe it will be different when I'm gone and I don't really have the group to go back to.

Another important aspect of athlete relationships involved the experience of one athlete, Lauren, who admitted some difficulty in developing close relationships with teammates, athletic staff, and other non-athlete peers:

> "You never really have a chance to make other good friends outside of the team because you spend your whole time in athletics or in school. [I'm] deprived of friends for so long from the team and not being able to make friends outside of the team".

Although she reported having one close girlfriend who served as an important confidant in her preparations to leave sport, her lack of close relationships with other teammates appeared to have a negative impact on her feelings concerning exit from sport. For Lauren, who was unable to develop meaningful relationships with teammates, and in fact, competed against many of her teammates due to the nature of her sport (cross country), the lack of opportunities for interaction with non-athlete peers left her in a position of having fewer options for support. This finding is noteworthy as it suggests the lack of feeling "part of the team" can have negative consequences for athletes facing impending transition. Additionally, the type of sport team on which the athlete competes may also influence the types of relationships she develops with her athlete peers. Perhaps these significant connections to the team has a protective effect for female college athletes facing sport retirement while those who perceive a lack of adequate support systems may experience feelings of anxiety regarding future transition.

Relationships are a common theme within the literature on intercollegiate student-athletes. Researchers suggest one consequence of the college athlete's intense focus on sport is the development of close bonds with the teammates and coaching staff that

surround them on a daily basis (Parham, 1993). These close relationships with other athletes often come at the expense of opportunities to socialize with non-athlete peers. I could find no examples of current research exploring the influence of relationships with teammates and significant others on athletes' perceptions of their transition experiences. However, the current study suggests developing and maintaining significant relationships during the sport career can serve as important sources of support for the athlete as she nears formal career exit. Conversely, those athletes who fail to develop meaningful connections with peers appear to struggle with the idea of future transition as they have fewer outlets of support to help them deal with the challenges associated with preparing for sport retirement.

*I will forever be an athlete.* This theme, which appears closely related to concept of athlete identity, was one expressed prominently by all study participants. There were numerous examples of this aspect of the athlete's experience manifested in both interview and journal data. Following the end of a prolonged engagement with sports, each of the athletes seemed to reflect on how they continued to perceive themselves as college athletes while at the same time considering how they would begin to define themselves following the end of their sport careers. The comments of athletes vividly highlighted this cognitive work and provided insights into their sense making processes when preparing to transition to a new phase in their lives.

> "I should just be a good person and a good student. A regular, average student but
> that's not good enough. I still want to be part of some social tie and have a
> passion for fitness and athletics and stuff. You still want to be a part of that".

"It was an identity crisis because I'm still a student-athlete but I'm not

competing".


"It's weird to say that I'm no longer a student-athlete because in my mind I'm

thinking I will forever be an athlete".

There is a wealth of current literature addressing the impact of sports participation

on the development of a strongly held sense of athlete identity (Brewer et al., 1993;

Pascarella & Smart, 1991; Wolniak et al., 2001). Intercollegiate athletes often come to

college having participated in sport for a large portion of their primary and secondary

school years. This prolonged engagement with sport creates a situation where student-

athletes strongly associate with an athletic identity, often to the detriment of other

potential aspects of self (Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001). Having so strongly identified

with the athlete role for a large portion of their formative years, study participants seemed

thrust into a state of cognitive dissonance following the end of their college careers.

Many athletes felt they had a relatively short time to begin exploring and integrating new

aspects of identity while also reconciling the loss of a dominant aspect of self that defined

them for almost as long as they could remember:

"I've been playing since I was 4 years old. You're doing something your entire

life and then it's like stopped cold turkey".

There is a need for additional research exploring how athletes begin the process of

adjusting to a new sense of self after exiting sport, as well as how this process continues

and evolves in the period following retirement from sport. Study participants seemed to

express this struggle to develop a new identity as a central aspect of their experience in

preparing for exit from sport. Athletes appeared to spend a great deal of time considering who they would become once they were no longer in sport and how this new identity would influence other facets of their post-eligibility lives. The pervasive nature of this theme for all study participants suggests its potential significance for continued research on intercollegiate athlete transition.

*Free time.* Findings related to the theme of free time were another common thread in discussions with study participants. All five athletes specifically spoke of significant changes to their daily routines resulting from disengagement with sports participation. At first, many of the athletes looked forward to having unstructured free time. However, this enthusiasm soon turned into feelings of boredom and frustration as they struggled to find ways to fill the void left by the conclusion of their final season of eligibility:

> "I was like, oh my gosh, what do I do with this time. It feels so good but I felt like there was something else that needed to be done. I needed to be busier".

My discussions with Beth also provided insight into the apparent discomfort surrounding her newfound free time:

> I have a lot of free time on my hands now that I didn't have before and I thought I'd like it but I don't. I like it but you're sitting around and I have nothing to do. Let's just eat or something because there's nothing else. With soccer you're doing your homework or you're doing whatever you have to be doing and without it you're like, OK I did my homework. There's nothing else to do.

Athletes' reactions to free time were contextual with some respondents reporting more success in coping with increased free time than others. A few athletes focused more time on schoolwork while others took on part-time jobs, often for the first time in their

lives, or continued to work toward future goals through activities such as job searching

and applying to graduate programs. Other athletes struggled with the loss of their

previously structured schedules. The idea that athletes may experience adjustment

difficulties when disengaging from a rigorous athletic schedule seems plausible given the

demands of an intercollegiate athletic career (Parham, 1993; Watt & Moore, 2001). Some

consequences of participation in rigorous sport routines can include fewer opportunities

to engage in extracurricular and social events, part-time employment, and other various

leisure events outside of the college environment. Although many athletes saw the

expansion of unstructured free time as a potential opportunity to explore additional

interests and goals, they had little prior experience in understanding how to manage this

free time, and this created feelings of anxiety. This finding is noteworthy as it reflects the

idea expressed in prior literature that some aspects of athlete transition perceived as

positive by athletes can also serve as potential sources of stress. Almost all of the athletes

in this study looked forward to having expanded free time following the sport career;

however, when faced with this reality they often found themselves unable to decide how

to fill their time. This uncertainty of what to do with expanded free time actually created

a sense of anxiety for a number of participants. Such findings add to researchers'

understanding of the complexities of athletes' transition experiences and help to clarify

aspects of the seeming contradiction expressed in the literature regarding whether or not

athletes face difficulty in adjusting to post-eligibility life.

 *It creeps up on you.* Interviews with study participants reflected their perception

that the end of a career in college sports could quietly sneak up on the college athlete. For

some this theme manifested as a form of nostalgia in which they looked back on their careers, scarcely believing four to five years has passed:

> "You're doing something your entire life and then it's stopped cold turkey. My season is really done, what?"

For other athletes, this finding related to the reality that spending so much time focusing on sport resulted in the belief of being inadequately prepared for the future:

> "It just creeps up on you and I don't think athletes are able to think about preparing to leave sports because they really don't know what it's necessarily going to take".

> "While I'm playing I don't think preparing to leave sports is a factor because you're just so busy with playing. You're concentrating on the team and the game".

Several athletes believed a prolonged focus on athletics inhibited their ability to look beyond their current sports career in order to take the necessary steps to prepare for their future lives in the "real world":

> "I wasn't as focused on thinking about life after sports as I should have been because basketball was such a huge part of my life that it was hard to look beyond what it offered me".

Again, as there is no literature specifically addressing the pre-transition experiences of college athletes in the period leading up to sport retirement, it is difficult to frame the above theme within existing literature. The fact this finding has not been explored in prior literature highlights the contributions of the current study to research in

this area. The idea of several participants expressing an inability to look beyond sport to begin the process of preparing for disengagement is one that may have important implications for future studies. In a study of Canadian college athletes adjusting to their lives after sport, Lally (2007) found a number of participants described an ability to shift their focus away from sport throughout the sport career. However, some athletes in this study reported quite the opposite. Furthermore, related literature on athlete experience discusses other potential explanations for the above findings as sports participation often limits opportunities for social and extracurricular activities (Watt & Moore, 2001) and to inhibit the development of other aspects of identity beyond the athlete role (Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001). The prolonged engagement with sport required of the successful college athlete may result in a reduced ability to consider aspects of a future beyond sport until the reality of retirement is fully upon them.

*They think they do a lot.* The final theme I wish to discuss centers on the degree to which athletes believed they were adequately prepared for exit from intercollegiate sport. All study participants expressed opinions of institutional support systems designed to help provide guidance to athletes preparing for exit from sport:

"Preparation for transition is non-existent".


"I went into my mock interview last year and a career was the farthest thing from my mind. I felt gross and I was just trying to get it over with".

"We have a lot of stuff we can use for that [preparing for transition]. We can go in and get help with our resumes and there's a career office with people in it and stuff. It's funny because I've never used it".

Perceptions ranged from being totally without sufficient support structures to the recognition that some resources were available, but athletes were hesitant to take advantage of them or did not see them as necessary for their own situations. Some athletes also appeared to doubt the real benefit of existing institutional support structures in assisting in their preparations for leaving sport as referenced in the following statement:

"I don't really feel like athletic departments do much. Sometimes they think they do a lot but they don't really do much. I feel there should have been a gradual program set up about reality about life after college".

Although many athletes reported feeling unprepared for life after sport, they also highlighted a number of sport-related experiences that appeared to play a beneficial role in helping them prepare for their lives after college. They believed many of the lessons learned from sports competition, particularly in team sport, could serve an important role in preparing them for post-eligibility life:

"That's a huge reason as to why she [a former teammate] was hired. She expressed that she communicates well with others and that she's a team player and she's used to being on a team".

The lack of research focusing on how intercollegiate athletes prepare for sport retirement makes the above theme a novel contribution to current literature on athlete transition. As I could find no studies examining the transition experiences of athletes

immediately prior to formal career exit, the above data regarding athlete preparation for transition provides a foundation for new research in this area. However, in order to relate these novel findings to prior literature I point to information in both Chapters 1 and 2, which provided the reader with an overview of various life-skills programs available to NCAA student-athletes. These programs seek to address some of the issues related to sport retirement (e.g. career counseling, resume development, financial planning). That there are a number of programs developed by the NCAA and its member institutions to help assist athletes with aspects of their lives after sport, but the idea that these athletes may be somewhat hesitant to take advantage of them appears to be of significance. Although the NCAA and athletic staff at various institutions recognize the importance of such programs and work diligently to implement them, many athletes may not realize the benefits of these good intentions.

*Additional Findings*

In addition to discussing the seven significant themes described above, I also wish to present a number of additional findings obtained from research data. These findings include the apparent stability of athlete perceptions regarding their pre-transition experiences over time, the occurrence of adjustment difficulties for athletes approaching impending transition from sport, and the challenges I experienced in gaining access to student-athlete populations.

*Stability of athlete perceptions regarding pre-transition.* The goal of this study was to capture the essence of experience for five Division I female college athletes preparing to transition out of sport. To achieve this goal, I developed data collection strategies aimed at collecting a broad snapshot of experience through a single, in-depth,

phenomenological interview as well as capturing each athlete's evolving experience over time using bi-weekly journaling exercises. The use of the journal exercise was relatively successful with three of the five athletes responding to the initial request to journal and two of five responding to subsequent requests. In my analysis of study data, including both individual phenomenological interviews and journal responses, I discovered athletes' perceptions of their experience remained relatively consistent across both their interviews and journal responses. Put simply, the perspectives athletes shared during the initial interview did not seem to change over the period leading up to exit from sport. Those athletes who expressed adaptive coping strategies for dealing with impending transition continued to maintain these effective strategies while those athletes expressing initial adjustment difficulties continued to struggle with the reality of their impending transition.

I suggest this finding as having important implications for future scholarship and practice related to student-athlete transition. The idea that perceptions of study participants appeared to remain consistent over time suggests the need for institutions to be involved in the preparations of athletes during the pre-transition period. If athletes are able to develop positive interpretations of impending transition then perhaps they will be more likely to navigate the subsequent transition period more effectively. Conversely, it appears those athletes feeling less supported, and who develop negative perceptions of their experience, may continue to express some negativity regarding future transition.

Another reason consistency of attitude may be important is if an athlete's perception of impending transition remains consistent during her preparations for exit, perhaps this perception will also remain consistent following her formal exit from sport.

If so, there may be some benefit for athletes to develop a positive view of transition during the period leading up to sport retirement, which may serve to "inoculate" her to the challenges of life after sport. Actions prior to formal transition, specifically college athletes shifting focus from sport to other personal and vocational goals may have important consequences on future coping behaviors (Lally, 2007). However, since I could find only one prior study examining the pre-transition experiences of college athletes preparing for sport transition, it appears this potential connection between athletes' perceptions of the period leading up to exit from sport and their reported success at entering post-eligibility life have not been adequately explored. Data from participant interviews and journal responses seems to hint at the possibility of a connection between athletes' initial perceptions of sport retirement and their continuing view of career transition over time. This potential connection provides some incentive for athletic departments to monitor the experiences of athletes preparing for sport retirement and to equip them with the skills they need so they feel more confident in approaching future transition.

*Occurrence of adjustment difficulties.* An additional finding in this study relates to previous research by Wylleman (1995) involving the percentage of athletes at all levels who seemingly encounter severe adjustment difficulties when facing sport retirement. Research suggests as many as 15% of athletes will face some adjustment difficulties. In the current study, one of the five athletes included in my sample, Lauren, appeared to experience more pronounced adjustment difficulties to impending transition as compared to the other four athletes. When asked to describe her perceptions of preparing to leave sport, she expressed:

"You're like an old dog. You're too old to be there anymore. It almost feels like

my time has passed. Not many other people actually care because they're focused

on those other people now and they just see you as someone that's fading away".

Based on this description of her experience as well as her other statements highlighted in

previous sections, she appeared to feel extremely isolated. Lauren hesitated to ask for

assistance, as she perceived others either did not care about her nor had an understanding

of what she was experiencing. If one applies current estimates of adjustment difficulties

from the literature to the approximately 380,000 NCAA student-athletes competing in

intercollegiate sport in any given year, the outcome is significant. Although researchers

have conducted virtually no research on the transition experiences of college athletes and

the challenges these students may face during their transitions, the current study suggests

some difficulties may indeed exist. Additionally, the type of sport in which athletes in

this study competed (e.g. team versus individual sport) seemed to shape some of their

perspectives. This apparent finding may merit further scrutiny in future research as well.

*Access to study population.* The final finding I wish to discuss centers on my

experience in gaining site access to student-athletes. Both anecdotal evidence and

scholarly research (Duderstadt, 2003; Funk, 1991; Lester, 1999; Sperber, 2000) highlight

the political nature of intercollegiate athletics. It is as an enterprise that often brings

notoriety and fiduciary benefits to many postsecondary institutions. Due to this reality, I

expected some institutions of higher education would want to protect the time and

experience of their athletes by controlling the number of non-sport distractions. This

proved true for my experience with data collection efforts.

In early Spring 2010, I began discussions with the athletic staff at a large, public, Midwestern, Division I institution, which employed a prior colleague of mine. This colleague was eager to introduce me to her peers and worked to help connect me with administrators who would ultimately make the decision on whether to allow site access. After one month of back and forth e-mail negotiations, these administrators ceased communications and were no longer willing to entertain my requests to contact athletes. Following this initial failure, I was referred to a large, private, Southeastern, Division I institution by the same colleague I mentioned previously. I contacted an athletic administrator at that institution through e-mail who seemed open to discussing my request. He asked for my contact information so we could discuss details by phone. After setting up a time to call, the administrator never contacted me nor would he return additional requests to discuss recruitment of study participants.

Following the above two incidents, I next contacted the athletic department at a large, public, Division I institution in the Southern Plains at which I had several contacts. Two of the athletic administrators overseeing women's sports seemed open to assisting me and stated they would provide a list of names and contact information of athletes. I shared my gratitude for their assistance and waited for this information so I could begin contacting potential participants. After four weeks of waiting, I attempted to contact the administrators on five separate occasions after which they ultimately agreed to provide me with the names of only three student-athletes. I followed up with the three athletes they provided and I was able to make contact with a fourth athlete at the suggestion of one of the original three participants.

Finally, a mutual friend referred me to a fifth athlete at a large, private, Midwestern university and I was able to include her in the study. Following our interview, this athlete encouraged me to contact her institution to see if I additional athletes would be willing to share their experiences. At her suggestion, I proceeded to contact the institution at which time the senior women's athletic director informed me she would not give me permission to contact additional athletes because they were preparing to participate in another upcoming study and she needed to be sensitive to their time commitments.

I recount my experience in an effort to inform future researchers of the potential realities of undertaking research on intercollegiate athletics due to the complex, political culture of the enterprise. Based on my experience, I see these difficulties as one potential reason for the lack of contemporary scholarship in this area but also recognize it as a reason to continue future research. We must not allow the challenges of conducting research with this population to diminish the opportunity for discovering important aspects of athletes' experiences that may serve to benefit them in the future.

*Potential Contributions of Theory to Understanding Athlete Transition*

The purpose of transcendental phenomenology is to capture the essence of participant experiences by limiting researcher preconceptions or biases that may influence what findings ultimately emerge from study data (Moustakas, 1994). As such, phenomenological studies require the researcher to explore and make explicit his or her assumptions and biases regarding a phenomenon and to eschew the use of theoretical lenses or other frameworks that may influence his or her *a priori* understanding

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(Moustakas). Therefore, I did not utilize a formal theoretical framework in the design of the study or in data analysis procedures.

However, I believe theory can have an important *a posteriori* role in assisting scholars and consumers of research in making sense of findings in a phenomenological study. As such, I draw upon Pauline Boss' (1999) ambiguous loss theory, which I believe may be of assistance in future studies on student-athlete transition by bringing additional layers of meaning to some aspects of participants' pre-transition experiences.

*Ambiguous Loss Theory*

Boss' (1999) concept of ambiguous loss has some relationship to her prior work on how individuals and families perceive and manage stress. However, the difference between ambiguous loss and normative, or expected, stressors individuals and families experience is the factor of ambiguity. This ambiguity results from stressful events rooted in some degree of uncertainty. Boss (1999) characterizes ambiguous loss as "frozen grief" (p. 4) and "the most stressful loss people can face" (p. 20). She conceptualizes the phenomenon as an event that creates boundary ambiguity within a family system and "defies resolution and creates confused perceptions about who is in or out of a particular family" (Boss, 2004, p. 553). The unresolved nature of ambiguous loss is what makes it so difficult to deal with. Additionally, Boss (1999) considers the term "family" as a structure that is more psychological than physical. In other words, she accepts individuals may experience, and therefore define, "family" beyond the automatically accepted understanding of family in terms of family of origin. This distinction is an important one as it suggests Boss' framework may apply to interconnected groups of athletes—groups the athletes themselves spontaneously refer to as "family."

From her research, Boss (1999) typically describes two types of ambiguous loss. The first type of ambiguous loss involves a situation where one considers the object of loss to be physically present but psychologically absent. The most common manifestation of this type of ambiguous loss relates to families caring for a loved one with a degenerative cognitive condition such as dementia or Alzheimer's disease. Other examples of this type of ambiguous loss can include cases where family members are emotionally removed or distant for reasons such as substance abuse, infidelity, or preoccupations with work or other endeavors (Abrams, 2001). In these cases, there is an ambiguous loss experienced by other members of the family.

The second type of ambiguous loss described by Boss (1999) involves a situation in which a loved one is psychologically present but physically absent. Examples of this category of ambiguous loss include children abducted from their families and military members missing in action (Abrams, 2001). This form of loss is difficult for individuals since there is no physical closure (i.e. evidence of a body, completion of burial rituals) to assist in reconciling their memories of the beloved.

Ambiguous loss is a model researchers have primarily used to analyze traumatic and non-normative loss for families and individuals (Abrams, 2001; Boss 2004; Boss, 2007). I am unable to find examples in which others have utilized this model to study athlete transition or athletic populations in general. However, Boss (2007) highlighted the growing diversity of populations to which scholars have applied the theory and called for researchers to continue to expand the use of ambiguous loss in studying "new situations and populations" (p. 109). I believe ambiguous loss theory holds great promise for highlighting important elements of athletes' pre-and post-transition experiences. First, the

way in which the theory conceptualizes family has important implications for student-athletes. Family is a psychological construct in ambiguous loss theory, and athletes may choose to include a variety of individuals (teammates, coaches, and support staff) as members of their sport family. In these instances, leaving the world of sport, and their "family members," has the potential to create a sense of boundary ambiguity for the athlete as viewed through this framework.

Another potential benefit of using ambiguous loss theory for studies on athlete transition relates to the previously discussed facets of athlete identity development. Student-athletes often spend a decade or more in youth sports prior to their participation in intercollegiate athletics, and then live the life of college athlete during the 4-5 years of their undergraduate experience. Expecting athletes, who may still be clinging to a deeply rooted aspect of athletic identity, to successfully transition to a new way of life in a relatively short period may truly be asking them to "say good-bye without leaving" (Boss, 2007, p. 105). Therefore, utilizing a theory that seeks to understand this phenomenon could provide a wealth of information. Likewise, as ambiguous loss theory is primarily concerned with the cognitive processes through which those coping with a loss reconcile their thoughts and feelings related to that experience, I see great potential for applying the theory to athletes whose identities are changing following the completion of their sport careers.

*Ambiguous Loss Theory in Future Research on Athlete Transition*

As discussed in the previous theme, *I will forever be an athlete*, several study participants highlighted their efforts to reconcile losing a part of their current identity, competitive college athlete, with how they would begin to define themselves as they

approached the reality of leaving sport. A number of particularly rich examples of this
phenomenon appear in my interview with Rebecca and I draw upon these examples when
discussing the potential use of ambiguous loss theory in future studies on athlete
transition. Rebecca relayed examples of how the perceptions of others, and her attempts
to define herself in relation to future career aspirations, influenced her reconciliation
process. From an experience at a recent party, Rebecca said:

> "I'm different because I'm taller. Some of the shorter girls maybe aren't asked as
> much but I think I'm just asked a lot like a lot of the tall basketball players.
> You're not asked, oh you play basketball? It's assumed, oh you're an athlete. You
> must play basketball or volleyball".

In addition, when discussing her plans for graduate school and a future career she stated:

> Even though I want to go into therapy I can't ever imagine being called a therapist
> before an athlete. That's crazy to me because therapy is my passion and therapy
> means more to me than basketball at this point. Basketball is my past and therapy
> is my future but it's still hard for me to put therapist or future therapist ahead of
> athlete.

When examining the above statements, there seems to be some cognitive
dissonance between how Rebecca has previously defined herself, as a competitive
basketball player, and how she and others now perceive her when she is no longer a
college athlete. Ambiguous loss theory provides a potentially useful lens through which
to view such data for a number of reasons. First, study data suggests competitive college
athletes experience the end of a prolonged sports career as a loss punctuated by both
positive and negative emotions. The sadness and relief of ending one's sport career

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creates a sense of ambiguity for the athlete, a finding reflected in the theme of *bittersweet* described previously. As such, ambiguous loss theory could be useful in examining the results of future studies highlighting the recent career termination of college athletes.

Second, ambiguous loss theory addresses the cognitive dissonance that can exist when the psychological and physical aspects of a loss are incongruent. This dissonance is apparent in Rebecca's statements, as well as in my discussions with other athletes in this study. There seems to be a disconnect between the physical loss of the sport career (e.g. Rebecca no longer competes on the team and, thus, is removed from the prior rituals that defined her experience as a competitive athlete) and a continued psychological association with the athlete role (e.g. athlete still remains the dominant aspect of identity even through her focus has shifted to future goals). The ambiguity resulting from the physical absence of the sport career coupled with a continued perception of self as athlete is as much a reality to the athletes in this study as it is to other populations traditionally studied using ambiguous loss theory. As such, the novel use of ambiguous loss theory in this context could be an important next step in broadening our understanding of athlete transition and the experience of athletes coping with impending sport retirement.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the experience of participants by attempting to transcend preconceptions, assumptions, and *a priori* frameworks. As such, I applied ambiguous loss theory to a few, limited findings to provide examples of how the theory could be utilized in future research. However, I believe this theory may have an important *a priori* or expanded *a posteriori* role in future studies on intercollegiate athlete transition. I advocate for further inquiry to include ambiguous loss as a theoretical lens in studies examining athlete transition. Using

ambiguous loss as an *a priori* framework could serve as an important next step in validating the usefulness of the theory as an additional tool in exploring athletes' transition experiences.

<center>*Limitations*</center>

It is important to recognize the limitations of any study and to assist the reader in determining the relevance of a particular body of findings. The first is an expected limitation of the selected methodology. Phenomenological research, in general, encourages discovery of shared group experience; transcendental phenomenology, specifically, allows the opportunity to develop a greater understanding of a phenomenon through a transcendence of the researcher's preconceived assumptions and biases regarding a particular phenomenon. I believe transcendental phenomenology to be a good fit with the current study as intercollegiate athletics is a highly politicized endeavor in which a number of stakeholders have their own opinions and preconceptions. Transcendental phenomenology is helpful in capturing the deeply rooted experience of participants aside from these preconceptions; however, one limitation of the approach is it does not encourage applicability of findings to wider populations. The insights obtained in this study regarding preparation for sport transition represents only the experiences of the female athletes involved in my research at the particular time at which the study was conducted. Although a number of important findings resulted from this research, and are suggestive for considering other female athletes' transition from sport, one must take care when transferring results to the experience of other female athletes.

A second limitation relates to the study's small sample size. A benefit of working with a small number of participants includes the ability to focus on obtaining

depth of information. Although a small sample size allows the researcher to focus on depth, it is not necessarily conducive to developing breadth of understanding. Athletes in this study represented only two institutional types (e.g. one large public institution and one large private institution). In addition, there were only 1-2 athletes participating in each of four sports and the sample was not necessarily representative of racial proportions currently observed in college sport (e.g. 4 of the 5 athletes in the sample identified as Caucasian with one identifying as African-American). Although many findings from this study have important implications for our understanding of female college athlete transition, the reader should view these findings as suggestive rather than exhaustive in developing a framework for viewing the female intercollegiate athlete's pre-transition experience.

*Recommendations for Future Research*

The first recommendation I provide involves increasing the number of qualitative studies within athlete and other sport-related research. Hemmingson (2009) highlights the lack of qualitative studies within athlete research as a missed opportunity for furthering our understanding of a number of issues commonly studied in this area. The overwhelming majority athlete studies, including those on college student-athletes, utilize quantitative approaches. Quantitative methods have an important place in educational and social science research; however, qualitative methods are equally as important to our understanding of athlete experience as they allow researchers to more fully explore depth of experience and are often crucial for engaging in exploratory research of phenomena on which little is known. Additional qualitative studies may also assist in aligning the espoused needs of retiring college athletes with the range of programs offered by their

respective institutions. The expansion of qualitative methods in studying the lives of student-athletes, and competitive athletes in general has the potential to complement existing quantitative approaches, strengthen current scholarship in this area, and improve best practices in student-athlete services. As such, future studies should continue to examine the viability and utility of qualitative approaches in examining the lives of intercollegiate athletes.

Another recommendation is to continue research on the transition experiences of intercollegiate athletes, and female college athletes specifically. As discussed in my review of the literature few studies examine the transition experiences of college athletes, as the vast majority focus on the elite and professional athlete (Allison & Meyer, 1988; Baillie, 1992; Curtis & Ennis, 1988; Drahota & Eitzen, 1998; Koukouris, 1991, 1994; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Swain, 1991). There is still much to discover regarding the transition experiences of college student-athletes and it would behoove researchers to continue to explore how aspects of both pre- and post-transition experiences influence the post-eligibility lives of student-athletes. There are a number of opportunities for future studies in this area, which include research on diverse populations of athletes and the use of alternative paradigms and novel methodologies. Future research should also seek to examine the influence of the quality and type of relationships athletes develop on their pre- and post-transition experiences, how athletes deal with the continuing process of adjusting to a new sense of self following formal transition, and the occurrence of adjustment difficulties for intercollegiate athletes facing sport retirement. Regardless of the type and scope chosen, it is clear we must work to increase our understanding of the

pre-transition experiences of both male and female college athletes in order to better prepare them for future success.

A final recommendation for future research includes examining the relationships among context factors of the athlete's experience (e.g. institutional type, sport played, access to support systems) and the transition experiences of student-athletes. In the current study, each participant experienced her preparations for transition differently, and these unique experiences influenced findings as well as the ultimate outcomes of this study. It is conceivable that future studies conducted with athletes in different sports and at different institutions could yield findings that are different from those presented in this work. When examining the larger body of athlete research the need for investigating the role of context in athlete experience becomes more apparent. The experiences of athletes differ widely due to a number of variables regarding sport participation including institutional type, sport played, and division in which athletes compete (i.e. Division I, Division II, and Division III). These contextual differences may have implications for the study of athlete transition and influence how different groups of athletes perceive their ability to successful cope with life after sport.

*Summary and Conclusions*

*Conclusion*

There are a number of important conclusions from this study related to research, theory, and practice. By addressing the contributions this project makes to the field of education in each of these areas, I hope to allow the reader to recognize the broad implications of this study for future researchers and practitioners.

*Research.* It is clear from a review of research findings that athletes in this study experienced a number of positive and negative emotions regarding their impending transition from intercollegiate sport. Some findings were consistent with prior literature on the topic; however, other findings had no basis for comparison, which is one example of the important contributions this project makes to current literature. Although the study adds a number of novel findings to the discussion of sport transition, the lack of information available on this topic highlights the need for additional scholarship in further developing our understanding of the transition experiences of intercollegiate athletes. Future work in this area could help determine whether findings in this study remain consistent or if additional research presents alternative elements of student-athletes' experiences.

In addition, researchers should seek methodologies that reflect the transitional nature of sport retirement. The current study captured the experiences of athletes during a relatively short period; however, this experience is by nature transitional and continues to evolve over time. There are significant opportunities for discovery at a number of points throughout the process of athlete transition, and researchers should explore methodologies allowing for flexibility in examining various points in this experience as well as conceptualizing the meaning of *transition* for a variety of college student-athletes.

Another area of consideration for future work includes the recognition of researcher position vis-à-vis the area of context for the study – something that can create both opportunities and challenges for scholarship on athlete transition. The idea of position emerges from contemporary methodological imperatives that require researchers to reflect on their relationship with the topic of interest and manifests in a number of

philosophical, epistemological, and methodological ways. One example of this concept is my position as an outsider to this topic due to my lack of experience as a college athlete. This reality naturally leads me to make certain decisions about pursuing my study of the phenomenon in a way that could differ substantially from an individual who was a former college athlete. Other examples of researcher position include sex, gender, and class; theoretical lenses utilized in a study; and other diverse perspectives the researcher may use to view a phenomenon based on his or her own unique experience. Each researcher position brings both benefits and challenges, and a given position is neither inherently positive nor negative.

My position as an outsider to college sport is a potential benefit allowing me to view the topic from a novel perspective not shaped by sport culture. However, as an outsider, I might lack an understanding of the cultural norms and markers of intercollegiate sport and this may ultimately shape the claims I make about the experiences of student-athletes. Researcher position is a critical aspect of qualitative research and future studies should seek to recognize the role variations in one's position to the research can play in adding to our knowledge of athlete experience.

A final contribution of this study is in initiating the conversation on the role of gender in shaping the transition experiences of college student-athletes. Prior studies on student-athlete experience acknowledge many superficial differences between male and female athletes; however, research on athlete transition has not addressed these differences with any real depth of consideration. It appears gender may have some place in our consideration of college athlete transition and the lack of research on female athletes' transition was one motivation for this study. However, interestingly, data

analysis at this stage did not exhibit strong gender characteristics. Glimmers of gender difference appeared in a few findings including:

"Look at where all the money goes in athletics and that's where all the support also goes. I would say basketball and football. That's where you get your support with athletics and academics. That's where people get the attention and it really sucks."

"I still hang out with my teammates and those girls are some of the closest friends I'll ever have because we connect and we understand each other and we've experienced the same things."

Although gender references appear in these statements (e.g. pointing out males get more attention in college athletics, and the bond some women create as part of their athletic careers), as well as in other horizons from the data, I am uncertain if participants referenced this as an important aspect of their transition experience or simply as a factor present in their individual situations.

Adding to this uncertainty, a study by Lally (2007) presented a number of similarities between the transition experiences of male and female athletes in her study. I also found similarities between reports from participants in this study and the male and female athletes in the Lally study. Based on statements from athletes in my study, elements of the broader literature on student-athletes, and the many gendered experiences female athletes report as part of their experiences in other studies, gender seems important to consider in studies of athlete transition. The duration of the study and the researcher's sex/gender (male while studying a female athlete population) may contribute

to the limited data suggesting gender as an important component of transition. An additional possibility is that, despite previous research finding that females face some additional stressors in transitioning from sport, the athlete role poses challenges for athletes that transcend gender. I would encourage future researchers to continue to explore this potential connection and to utilize gender as a lens in studies that attempt to expand our knowledge of athlete transition.

*Theory.* Although the main purpose of this research was to capture the experiences of study participants without utilizing a particular framework, I presented the reader with a potential lens, ambiguous loss theory, through which to inform our future understanding of athlete transition. Researchers should conduct additional studies to examine the utility of contemporary theories in education and the social sciences in updating what we know about the career transition of intercollegiate athletes. In addition, I also believe there is great potential in exploring college student-athlete transition from a grounded theory approach in an effort to develop a theory of college athlete transition that might continue to inform our understanding of this phenomenon.

Findings within the current study seem to support the use of visual methods to elicit important data regarding the experience of college student-athletes. As such, I encourage researchers to continue the use of visual, and other alternative, qualitative methods in their work with competitive athletes and in qualitative studies in general. The use of visual methods appears extensively in prior work on social and visual anthropology (Collier & Collier, 1986) and, to a limited extent, in sport psychology and athlete-related research (Curry; Snyder & Kane, 1990; Johnson, Hallinan, & Westerfield, 1999; Harrison & Lawrence, 2003, 2004; Phillips, 2004). Researchers including Gonzales

and Jackson (2001) and Hall et al. (1998) argue for the use of visual methods with athletes by citing visual artifacts and imagery use as common elements within contemporary sport culture. Based on these findings I suggest future research utilize novel qualitative tools, such as the drawing exercise in this study, as active data collection tools. Additional uses of visual and creative-arts based qualitative methods include replication of the drawing method as both a data-elicitation tool and potentially as a stand-alone data source – assuming the researcher is qualified to interpret such data – in future studies examining both college student-athlete populations as well as other groups of competitive athletes.

Another potentially useful creative-arts based tool could include Pennybaker's (2004) therapeutic writing method. In developing this method, Pennybaker asked study participants to keep a journal of their experiences regarding some stressful or traumatic event they experienced. This journal provided participants with a therapeutic outlet to help cope with the stressful experience. Based on my work with this study, I see the potential benefit of utilizing Pennybaker's method. First, by utilizing this method as originally designed, student-athlete populations could benefit from the therapeutic exercise as another source of support. In addition, Pennybaker's writing technique could serve as an alternative data elicitation tool for guiding a series of phenomenological interviews in a fashion similar to the drawing method in this study.

*Practice.* As the nature of phenomenological inquiry is inconsistent with direct practical application, it is difficult to encourage application of study findings to the work of college and university personnel. However, I believe data collected in this study provides important tentative insights regarding resources available to athletes in transition

and may contribute to future discussions on best practices in athlete support services. All of the athletes in the current study expressed perceptions that resources available to help support their preparations for leaving sport were either inadequate or unnecessary for their individual circumstances. These beliefs led many athletes to opt out of existing services that may have been important sources of support. Although the study sample is small and minimally diverse, athletic administrators should take heed of these initial findings and determine whether specific services offered at their respective institutions adequately meet the needs of athletes who are facing career exit from sport. The belief by some participants that athletic departments "think they do a lot but they don't really do much" suggests a troubling disconnect between the perceptions of athletic support staff who develop programs for student-athletes and the athletes who choose whether to utilize those resources. Athletic department personnel could become important partners in the process of researching best practices for supporting the needs of retiring athletes, while better equipping their own staff to provide for the needs of college athletes.

*Research Summary*

The goal of this study was to examine the pre-transition experiences of Division I female intercollegiate athletes preparing for exit from competitive sport. I utilized transcendental phenomenology to capture the essence of experience for study participants and to gain insight into what it meant to be a female college athlete readying for the end of her career in sport. In Chapter 1, I introduced the reader to the proposed study by providing a brief overview of relevant research on college student-athletes and the reality of their future transition from sport. This chapter also presented the intended problem of focus along with the study's purpose and central research question. Finally, I concluded

the chapter with a discussion of the importance of and rationale for examining the experiences of female student-athletes preparing to exit sport as well as intended audiences for the study.

Chapter 2 provided a review of relevant literature beginning with an historical context of intercollegiate athletics and an overview of the contemporary college student-athlete. This review continued with a general introduction to career transition for athletes at all levels of competition, a discussion of athlete identity and its relationship to athlete transition, and a brief review of support programs typically offered to student-athletes facing sport retirement. The literature review then concluded with an in-depth examination of scholarship pertinent to the transition experiences of intercollegiate athletes followed by a summary of the literature and potential gaps in current research scholars should address to refine further our understanding of athlete transition.

The goal of Chapter 3 was to present the methodology chosen for this study, transcendental phenomenology, and to discuss how the assumptions and procedures associated with this approach were consistent with the current project. The chapter began with an overview of transcendental phenomenology along with its philosophical assumptions and guidelines for conducting phenomenological research. I provided an outline of the intended research methods including detailed data collection techniques, a brief overview of phenomenological data analysis, and strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in the study.

In Chapter 4, I presented the reader with a number of findings that emerged from an examination of study data. I engaged in further attempts at epoché, or bracketing, before initiating data analysis procedures in an effort to explore the biases and

preconceptions, which led me to this research. Following this second attempt at bracketing, I presented a number of findings including significant horizons and important clusters of meaning developed through a process of phenomenological reduction. Based on insights obtained from these significant statements and themes, I constructed textural and structural descriptions of experience, which would be necessary for illuminating the overall essence of group experience for study participants. In the concluding sections of Chapter 4, I briefly reported a number of findings related to the drawing method used in this study and its utility as a data elicitation tool with the current sample.

The purpose of Chapter 5 was to provide a forum for the discussion of study findings in the context of contemporary literature on athlete experience and career sport transition. I began the chapter by first addressing the study's central research question and then moved forward with a discussion of the seven themes developed from research data. In addition to addressing the seven significant themes presented in the Chapter 4, I also discussed a number of additional study findings I also saw as important. After completing my presentation of various study findings, I provided an overview of ambiguous loss theory and explored how this theory may have some utility for our future understanding of the pre-transition experiences of college student-athletes. Finally, I concluded the research by presenting a number of important study limitations and future directions for research as well as conclusions regarding the dissertation's contributions to educational research, theory, and practice.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Approval Documentation

# Appendix A1

## IRB Study Approval

### Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Tuesday, December 15, 2009

IRB Application No ED09161

Proposal Title: Preparing for Transition From Sport: A Phenomenological Examination of the Pre-Transition Experiences of Female Intercollegiate Athletes at one NCAA Division I Institution

Reviewed and Processed as: Expedited

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved    Protocol Expires: 12/14/2010

Principal Investigator(s):
David Eric Archer             Kerri Shutz Kearney
P.O. Box 14548                315 Willard
Chicago, Il 60614            Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

☒ The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Beth McTernan in 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, beth.mcternan@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Shelia Kennison, Chair
Institutional Review Board

# Appendix A2

## IRB Study Modification Approval

**Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Date: | Tuesday, February 16, 2010 | Protocol Expires: | 12/14/2010 |
| IRB Application No: | ED09161 | | |

Proposal Title: Preparing for Transition From Sport: A Phenomenological Examination of the Pre-Transition Experiences of Female Intercollegiate Athletes at one NCAA Division I Institution

Reviewed and Processed as: Expedited

**Modification**

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s)  **Approved**

Principal Investigator(s):

David Eric Archer
P.O. Box 14548
Chicago, Il 60614

Kerri Shutz Kearney
315 Willard
Stillwater, OK 74078

The requested modification to this IRB protocol has been approved. Please note that the original expiration date of the protocol has not changed. The IRB office MUST be notified in writing when a project is complete. All approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB.

- The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

The reviewer(s) had these comments:

The modification request to add ▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇▇ as a research site is approved.

Signature :

*Shelia M. Kennison*

Shelia Kennison, Chair, Institutional Review Board

Tuesday, February 16, 2010
Date

Appendix B

Study Forms

Appendix B1

Participant Solicitation Information

Memo

Date:

To:

From:         D. Eric Archer – Principal Investigator

Re:            Opportunity to participate in study of female athletes

I have been approved to conduct a research study of female student-athletes. Via this
memo, I want to provide you with information about the study and **invite you to be a
participant**. Your participation is important and may assist the researcher in obtaining
information that will benefit future athletes preparing for transition out of sport. You are
being contacted because you meet the following inclusion criteria for this study: 1) Have
completed their last season of eligibility in intercollegiate athletics within the current
academic semester (Spring 2010); 2) Plan to complete their degree and graduate from, or
otherwise exit, the institution within the current academic year (prior to Fall 2010); and
3) Have no plans to be a player in formal, competitive, career sport at any level:
professional, semi-professional, developmental and amateur leagues.


Study Title:   *Preparing for Exit from Sport: A Phenomenological Examination of the
               Pre-Transition Experiences of Female Intercollegiate Athletes at One
               NCAA Division I Institution*

               This study explores the individual experience of NCAA Division I, female
               intercollegiate athletes who are preparing to transition out of their sport.

               Data collection expected to begin March 2010 and extend through May
               2010; results expected in summer 2010.

**Participation is strictly voluntary**. You may withdraw at any time. By agreeing to
participate, you will:
   1. Complete a written demographic survey;
   2. Participate in a one-on-one interview of 60-90 minutes;
   3. Respond to a series of brief (approximately 15 minutes) online, bi-weekly
      contacts beginning after your initial interview and continuing until your exit from
      the university

Following are both the individual and institutional precautions the researchers will undertake to protect **confidentiality**.

- Individual names will be replaced with a number and names will be stored separately from the data. The only purpose for having a single number represent an individual is to keep related documents together. Reasonable precautions will be taken at all times to protect participant names.
- Data will be stored in the private office of the principal researcher and access will be strictly limited to use for the research project.
- It is likely that the final study results will be published; however, the name, location, or other details that make the study site or any individual identifiable will *not* be published.
- The study site and any interested participant will be provided with a copy of final study results. However, all of the confidentiality precautions described previously will remain in place. Participants will not be identified in any written documents or in verbal communications.

I will contact you to request an appointment at which time we can verbally discuss any questions or concerns you have about the study's purpose or processes.
Thank you for your consideration of this project.

Principal Researcher:

D. Eric Archer, MS, AMFT; (251) 228-2244; eric.archer@okstate.edu
Doctoral Candidate, College of Education, Oklahoma State University

Doctoral Advisor:

Kerri S. Kearney, Ed.D.; (405) 744-2755; kerri.kearney@okstate.edu
Assistant Professor, College of Education, Oklahoma State University

Research Consent Form

Project Title:   *Preparing for Exit from Sport: A Phenomenological Examination of the Pre-Transition Experiences of Female Intercollegiate Athletes at One NCAA Division I Institution*

Investigator:   **D. Eric Archer, MS, AMFT**
PhD Candidate, College of Education, Oklahoma State University and principal investigator

Advisor:   **Kerri S. Kearney, MBA, Ed.D.**
Assistant Professor, College of Education, Oklahoma State University

Purpose:   This study explores the individual experience of NCAA Division I, female intercollegiate athletes who are preparing to transition out of their sport.

Procedures:   By agreeing to participate in this study, you agree to do the following:
1. complete a written demographic survey;
2. complete a drawing exercise related to my current experience preparing for transition out of sport;
3. participate in a one-on-one interview related to my pre-transition experiences that will last approximately 60-90 minutes;
4. respond to a series of brief, bi-weekly online journal questions following the initial interview.

You further understand that interviews will be audio taped and transcribed as research data. All audio tapes will be destroyed within six months of the interview.

Risks:   There are no known risks associated with this project that are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

Benefits:   This study seeks to increase our understanding of the experiences of student-athletes preparing for their transition out of intercollegiate sport. It is reasonable to expect that results of the study will lead to additional studies that may have added benefits and impacts on the educational institution and its practices of preparing athletes for exit from sport.

Confidentiality:
1. Data will be stored and secured within the private office of the principal researcher;
2. The records of this study will be kept private. Any written results will discuss group findings and will not include information that will identify you. Research records will be stored securely and only the

researcher, the research advisor, and other individuals responsible for research oversight will have access to the records. It is possible that the consent process and data collection will be observed by research oversight staff responsible for safeguarding the rights and well-being of people who participate in the research;

3. Transcribed data will be kept for a minimum of 3 years and no more than 25 years;

4. Study results are expected to be published including findings from interview data and your drawing; however, the confidentiality of all data collected will be protected using numerical identifiers and pseudonyms rather than names for both individuals and the universities.

Contacts:        Questions about this study should be directed to the principal researcher:

D. Eric Archer; eric.archer@okstate.edu; (251) 228-2244

Or the study advisor:

Kerri Kearney; kerri.kearney@okstate.edu; (405) 744-2755

If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact Dr. Shelia Kennison, OSU IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu.

Participant Rights:
        You understand that participation is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate, and you may withdraw from this project at any time without penalty by notifying the principal researcher in writing.

You have read and fully understand the consent form. You sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form has been given to you.


_____        _____
Signature of Participant                        Date


Name (printed) _____


I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the participant sign it.


_____        _____
Signature of Researcher                        Date

Appendix B3

Demographic Profile

ID#: _____

1. Age: _____

2. Number of years at current institution: _____

3. Date of Expected College Graduation: _____

4. Did you receive a sports scholarship during your time at the institution?  Yes / No

5. What *best describes* your playing time:  Starter most of collegiate sports career

   Starter in last year or two

   Fluctuated between starter and $2^{nd}$ string

   Seldom played

6. What position(s) did you play during your last two years of eligibility?

   _____

7. How would you rate your relationship with your current head coach?

   Excellent            Good            Fair            Poor

8. How would you rate your relationship with one or more of your current assistant coaches?

   Excellent            Good            Fair            Poor

8a. Which coach(es) are you referring to in the above question (head coach, position coach, etc.)?

_____

9. How would you rate your relationship with fellow teammates?

Excellent                 Good                    Fair                    Poor

10. Given the opportunity, would you prefer to continue playing formal sports (i.e.: pro, semi-pro, etc.) beyond the university level?        Yes / No

11. What *best describes* your future plans for participating in sports (circle one)?

None          Informal play/city leagues     Professional/semi-pro          Unknown

12. Please rate the level of support you believe you have experienced as an athlete from the following groups:

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Athletic Department Staff: | High | Medium | Low | None |
| Other Academic Departments: | High | Medium | Low | None |
| Campus Community: | High | Medium | Low | None |
| Local Community/Fans: | High | Medium | Low | None |

13. Please indicate the types of support services and resources that you knew were provided to you during your time as an athlete to help prepare you for exit out of competitive sport:

14. How often did you take advantage of the above resources provided to assist you with

planning your transition out of sport:

Frequently             Occasionally             Rarely             Never

15. Which of the resources made available to you did you take advantage of the most

often to assist in your preparation for transition out of sport?

16. Overall, how would you rate the quality of the support services provided to you to

assist with preparation for transition?

Excellent             Good             Fair             Poor

Appendix B4

Provisions and Instructions for Drawings

Each participant will be provided one piece of white, 8 ½ x 11" paper, as well as a set of

colored markers or crayons. The researcher will not engage the respondent while she is

drawing but will remain in the room.

The following instructions will be given verbally:

- "Draw a picture or series of pictures that describe what preparing to leave sport

  is like for you. Do not use words or other symbols of language. You are not

  going to be evaluated on your artistic ability or the colors that you choose.

  Matchstick people, for example, are fine."

Appendix B5

Interview Guide

*Basic Structure of Interview*

1. Introduce study and answer participant questions about the study

2. Complete participant drawing(s)

    a. Ask participant to explain/interpret his/her drawing.

    b. Based upon the participants comments, the researcher responds with probing

        or follow up questions

3. Collect additional interview information according to interview guide as necessary.


*Key Questions*

What is your life like now that you have completed your sport?

Tell me what preparing for your transition means to you?

How did you decide what you want to do after college?

Who is providing guidance to you as you prepare for your transition?

Who will you become when you are no longer a college athlete?

Tell me about your experiences with coaches.

Appendix B6

Online Journal Guide – Sample Questions

*Basic Structure of Online Journal*

1. A series of links to several open-ended questions will be e-mailed to study participants on a bi-weekly basis

2. Respondents will be invited to complete the open-ended questions in an online survey program that will allow the researcher to collect participants responses

3. The researcher will e-mail additional reminders to study participants who fail to complete the journal responses within one week after the initial link is sent

*Sample Journal Questions*

What has your life been like since your last journal entry?

Tell me about your continuing preparation for life after sport.

How are you feeling this week as you prepare to leave the university and your sport?

What else do you want me to know about you during this time in your life?

Appendix C

List of Significant Horizons from

Study Data

Appendix C

**Significant Statements (Horizons) from Study Data**

1. I mean it's hard and it's not. Physically it's easy because you just stop playing. You don't have to stay in shape. But mentally I feel like it's hard because it's something you've been a part of all your life. Life? you lose your job or something you're physically down and you know you're never going to do that again.

2. You're doing everything on your own and you've never really done it on your own.

3. You're doing something your entire life and then it's stopped cold turkey. Literally you stop and you don't have any games and at the end of the season everyone's like, oh yes we have a break. That's how I was and now it's back where I should be playing again but I'm not and they're all playing games and you're just kind of like, ah man. My season's really done, what?

4. I still go to the practices and stuff. I try to stay involved because I still like my team. I still like to hang out with them. I have good relationships with my coaches.

5. There are some female athletes who do prepare but the bulk of those who really prepare are people who want to get a different type of professional degree.

6. I'd say my best girlfriend is probably the better go to source for all this stuff because she's been down the same road I have. I want to see how she's going about it and I am almost following her.

7. We went and watched some of their spring games and I want to be out there. I'll be sitting there watching like, God I just want to be out there playing but I can't.

8. I still identify with being on the soccer team or retired but right now I still consider myself within the team somewhat.

9. During the season you're traveling with teammates on 12 hour bus rides and you're with them a lot. So, they get to know you pretty well and so it's nice afterwards.

10. I guess it's bittersweet. When you're in it you're like, ugh I can't wait to be done. Then when you're done you're like, wait. I remember my friend who graduated two years ago. When she was finally done she was like, oh my gosh I want to play soccer again. I was like really? I can't wait to be done. She's like, no just wait and I was like no, you don't understand. Then when I was done, I'm like, OK I understand.

11. I'm not an athlete per se. I'm on the roster but I'm not competing. I still identify as that selected group of people here at the university. I look at other people and they're just the average student and here I am a student-athlete.

12. I wish it was one more year. I say that and then that year would be up and then I'd probably be like, oh just one more year.

13. Most of my good friends are athletes. I live with three soccer girls. Two of them are graduating with me and we've lived together since we were freshmen. So, we're going through the exact same thing. All of us. So, it's better for us to be together.

14. You identify with other people that are athletes and you recognize them and use the same services. You're around them and so you just know them and so that's why it feels like a frat or a sorority. I'll be at the recreation center and I'll see athletic clothing or a bag and I'll be like, oh what sport do you play or something like that.

15. I call it blank face [points to the face of the figure in the top left section of her drawing] because there wasn't happy emotion. It wasn't sad emotion it was just something that I had to do.

16. There's no program set up to prepare you. Everything I did was on my own.

17. Before the season even started I was like, oh I can't wait until soccer's done. I've been playing it all my life. I can't wait and I'm going to have so much free time. Then soccer's done and I'm like, oh crap. I'm crying and then I'm like, OK well wait this isn't bad and then now it…sucks.

18. It's hard to be an athlete but not a true athlete.

19. I don't really feel like athletic departments do much. Sometimes they think they do a lot but they don't really do much. I feel there should have been a gradual program set up about reality about life after college.

20.  I'd say at the same time it's bittersweet because I have been successful in the past but I still would say that I feel like I have unfinished business. I feel like a failure and that I won't have an identity when I'm gone.

21. Since there's nothing really available that I know of at this point for student-athletes in transition they're going to have to start taking those steps on their own.

22. I'm trying to process being happy with sports and that means being happy with myself and being a different person now.

23. Preparation for transition is non-existent.

24. When you're playing soccer you're like, I just wish I had free time but then after you're done you're like, OK I don't want free time I want to be busy all the time.

25. I should just be a good person and a good student. A regular, average student but that's not good enough. I still want to be part of some social tie and have a passion for fitness and athletics and stuff. You still want to be a part of that.

26. It just sucks if a person doesn't really know what they want to do and they don't ask anybody for help which is something that you can potentially see in student-athletes. They do not want to ask for help. They would almost rather fail than ask for help or just struggle on their own.

27. I've never used any resources since I've been here but I know a lot of people who spend a lot of time in there. We have a lot of resources that can help us but I haven't personally used any of it. It's actually really funny.

28. Being on that team for so long you never really had a chance to make other good friends outside of the team because you spend your whole time in athletics or in school and now that I'm not so much spending my time in athletics I have a little bit more outside time.

29. You're like an old dog. You're too old to be there anymore. It almost feels like my time has passed. Not many other people actually care because they're focused on those other people now and they just see you as someone that's fading away.

30. I just had so much free time, it's like you have so much free time you don't know what to do with that free time because you're not accustomed to having free time.

31. As far as resources, I guess one of the reasons I don't use them is because I have no idea what I want to do. I think that's why I've never really had a reason to go in there.

32. I was kind of happy. I was like I can take a break but at the same time I was really sad because I'm not going to do that anymore.

33. Even though I want to go into therapy I can't ever imagine being called a therapist before an athlete. That's crazy to me because therapy is my passion and therapy means more to me than basketball at this point. Basketball is my past and therapy is my future but it's still hard for me to put therapist or future therapist ahead of athlete.

34. I'm going to nursing school and I don't know anybody that's going. I'm living by myself when I've lived with roommates forever. I'm taking these pharmacology classes that I've never known anything about. I'll be in a totally different city with no one I know. Getting to know people and trying to get as familiar with them as you were on the soccer field it's different.

35. It was an identity crisis because I'm still a student-athlete but I'm not competing.

36. Being a student-athlete and having so many demands placed upon your time you expect people to kind of guide you through those kinds of things no matter what and help you decide. I don't think I've really encountered that yet.

37. Before the season ended, probably two months before it ended, I started to do a lot of job searching and a lot of trying to figure out what I was going to do.

38. You don't have as much definition in your day compared to when you are a student-athlete.

39. If you look at the football program or something like that they're going to get a lot more guidance than someone like me. They'll sit there and tell you in your ear what you have to do as opposed to me. Yes, I've been a good student in the past. Does that mean I know what I'm going to be? Does that mean that I'm on the same path I was a couple of years ago? Hell no.

40. I'm different because I'm taller. Some of the shorter girls maybe aren't asked as much but I think I'm just asked a lot like a lot of the tall basketball players. You're not asked, oh you play basketball? It's assumed, oh you're an athlete. You must play basketball or volleyball.

41. I still hang out with my teammates and those girls are some of the closest friends I'll ever have because we connect and we understand each other and we've experienced the same things.

42. During your junior year it's mandatory for all athletes at my university to do mock interviews but stuff like that is seen as, God who am I going to talk to? I don't even know what I want to do.

43. When I work out I'll work out like I should still be playing sport. I'll go for a jog and then I'm like, maybe I should do some sprints. You know, stuff I'm used to because I'm not tired enough. I should be more tired like with soccer when we would just run until we can't breathe.

44. On the soccer field when you mess up it's not as big of a deal because you have teammates or you have someone behind you. In the real world you work with people but you're more by yourself. In sport, you always had someone behind you. When you go somewhere else you're on your own.

45. I guess there is a sense of relief. It's kind of nice to know that I'm not just all the time school, soccer, soccer. I was looking forward to having a break and having some time to myself just to be a normal student rather than doing both. It was weird because it was the first time that I wasn't playing. I played year round and so it was a little bit of a shock that I'm not doing it at all anymore.

46. I'm still friends with teammates and even though I'm not with them all the time I'm still really good friends with them. It's not that big of a difference right now because we still talk and we still hang out and see each other. Maybe it will be different when I'm gone and I don't really have the group to go back to.

47. If I'm going to practice, whether I'm on the team or not I'm going to go out there and I'm going to play like I've always played and I'm going to do my best. When I go out to practice now I play the same way as I used to and I still get just as frustrated. I mess up and it's just, UGH, why am I playing so bad? I act exactly the same as if I was still playing even though I'm not.

48. I'm still friends with teammates and I still hang out with a bunch of the girls from the team. I still talk to the coaches so I'm still involved that way.

49. I went into my mock interview last year and a career was the farthest thing from my mind. I got dressed up and I went in to talk to her. I had no idea what I was talking about. I kind of dreaded it. I just got done with practice. I felt gross and I was just trying to get it over with.

50. I don't think athletes are able to begin thinking about leaving sports because in their mind they are thinking about what they can do to be a better athlete. When you're playing you're not really thinking about that if you don't have to.

51. You don't have someone telling you what to do. You just have to do it. You have to be mature. You have to mature a lot when you're done with soccer.

52. While I'm playing I don't think preparing to leave sports is a factor because you're just so busy with playing. You're concentrating on the team and the game.

53. There's a percentage of people who know what they want to do, people who kind of know, and people who completely don't know. There are people who really are not doing anything until April.

54. It's not just being friends it's being part of a team. It's almost like a family with your coaches and the team and you guys stay together and you travel all the time and compete again other schools. It's just something I would want anybody to have the opportunity to experience because it's that rewarding.

55. I was like, oh my gosh, what do I do with this time? It feels so good but I felt like there was something else that needed to be done. I needed to be busier.

56. I have a lot of free time on my hands now that I didn't have before and I thought I'd like it but I don't. I like it but you're sitting around and I have nothing to do. Let's just eat or something because there's nothing else. With soccer you're doing your homework or you're doing whatever you have to be doing and without it you're like, OK I did my homework. There's nothing else to do.

57. My friends, my family, my coaches, there are a lot of people I talk to. I talk to my parents and try to get their two cents worth and talk to my friends and coaches about it. We're all so close. We've all been working together the past four years.

58. I wish I could still play. I wish I had one more year left. You never know how fast it comes once it really does come.

59. My close friends play a role because a lot of times they're really honest. You can talk to them and they'll just tell you what's up.

60. A lot of the relationships I was able to form will probably be lifelong relationships. The fact that I'll be friends with them for a long, long time was another big benefit.

61. Look at where all the money goes in athletics and that's where all the support also goes. I would say basketball and football. That's where you get your support with athletics and academics. That's where people get the attention and it really sucks.

62. It's weird to say that I'm no longer a student-athlete because in my mind I'm thinking I will forever be an athlete.

63. It just creeps up on you and then it's like, what am I going to do and then it happens. I don't think athletes are able to think about preparing to leave sports because they really don't know what it's necessarily going to take.

64. The athletic department never thinks to give preparations to anything else. You're always told, oh yeah basketball is cool. Just keep doing it. Once school is over then your only option is to go overseas and play basketball or stay here and you have no idea what you want to do here.

65. Some of my friends are from the team and I've gotten very close to them and we will always be friends. I've got friends I've met through soccer that I played at other schools and I'm very, very good friends with them, too. I have a lot of friends who are athletes. They may be here or they may be elsewhere but I think that has helped a lot. I still have friends that aren't athletes but a majority of them are.

66. I was happy and sad. I remember my last meet. It was regionals. I was like, wow this is it. This is the last time I'm ever going to complete, like wow; it went by so fast it seemed I was just a freshman.

67. I don't think any athlete prepares for life after sport. That's why I said I was sad and then I was happy and then I didn't prepare myself that really in the end I'm not going to like it. I don't think you really prepare until it's done.

68. I have no idea what I could be doing after my undergraduate degree. I don't know if my academic advisor is supposed to be saying that or if I'm supposed to be working that out. Basically, I'm not very knowledgeable about my future.

69. I wasn't as focused on thinking about life after sports as I should have been because basketball was such a huge part of my life that it was hard to look beyond what it offered me.

70. I saw myself as having purpose with my church and that's the way I live my life. What I do revolved around my purpose with my church.

Appendix D

Participant Drawings with

Associated Narratives

Appendix D

**Figure 1. Beth's Drawing with Associated Narrative**
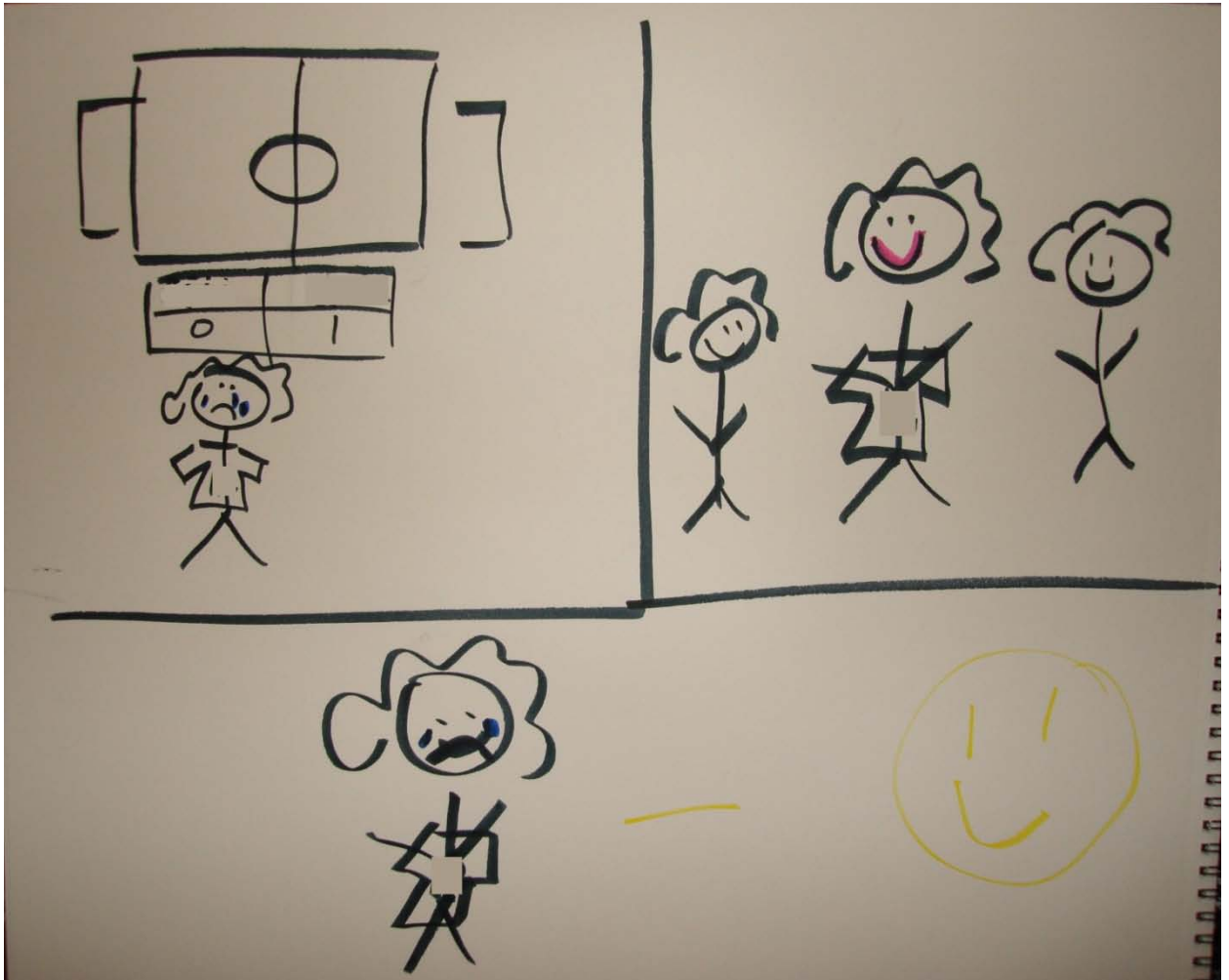


*Uh, OK well this first picture is like our last game I guess and I was really sad afterwards and then I'm crying and all that stuff. And then after a few, you know, a week or something I'm like, oh ok, this is good, no soccer. And then, a couple of weeks later and now I'm back to like, oh this sucks. Like now, I like really miss soccer. When, like, when before season even started I was like, oh I can't wait until soccer's done, you know? I've been playing it all my life. I can't wait and I'm going to have so much free time and then soccer's done and I'm like, oh crap. I'm crying and then I'm like, OK well wait this isn't bad and then now it...sucks.*

**Researcher Note: Dash and smiley face on the bottom right of drawing (in yellow) was added by participant at a later point in the interview after the initial completion of the drawing exercise.**

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**Figure 2. Sarah's Drawing with Associated Narrative**



*OK, well the first one is, I don't know if I would say happy but, um, kind of because four years of being an athlete is hard. It's demanding and it takes up a lot of your time and you have to be very dedicated to it. So, I guess there is a sense of relief like, ah, I get a little bit of a break. It's kind of nice to know that I'm not just all the time you know school, soccer, soccer. I was looking forward to having a break and having some time to myself and just to be like a normal student. Um, obviously that [points to second face in drawing] is because it's sad because I played soccer since I was 4 so it's a big passion of mine. I still love the game. You know, I still love to play so it was weird because it was the first time, really in my whole life, that I don't play. Because like I said I've been playing since I was 4 and I played all, all the time. And I played year round and so it was a little bit of a shock to be like well something I've been doing for so long I, I'm not doing it at all anymore. I'm not competing at that level anymore. This is more like [points to third face in drawing], um, I don't know if I'd say confused, not confused but kind of perplexed almost because then it's time to start figuring out what I really have to do with my life.*

**Figure 3. Lauren's Drawing with Associated Narrative**



*This represents triathlon. So, like running, biking, swimming. Above the running one I have a question mark because I'm not really too keen about running anymore even though I ran here. Right now there's a check mark by the bike because that's the only thing I'm doing right now because of my injuries and, um, it's kind of like where my passion is a little bit more now. Right here is swimming, my arms are a little bit longer, sorry. And it has kind of a mediocre face because I really should be swimming but I'm not swimming and I don't want to swim because I don't want to get in the pool and be in that little amount of clothes. And it's pointed to this girl who's supposed to be me and she's like all fit and stuff and she's this great athlete and then she's got this skirt on so it shows she's like super fit but yet she's super sexy and everything like that. And over here it's supposed to be the state where I live and I drew that because a lot of the times when I come to thinking about my running and my future with running or fitness or anything like that I always think about home because I think about the people that are expecting me to do good things and continue and be this great runner and everything and be 100%*

*successful. Over here I have some times or whatever because I always had times that I wanted to accomplish in my running. So, 35 minutes would be for a 10K, 16:30 would be for a 5K, 10 flat would be for a 3K, and 60 minutes would be for a 10 miler. Those are the times that are always going to be in my head.*

**Figure 4. Dorothy's Drawing with Associated Narrative**
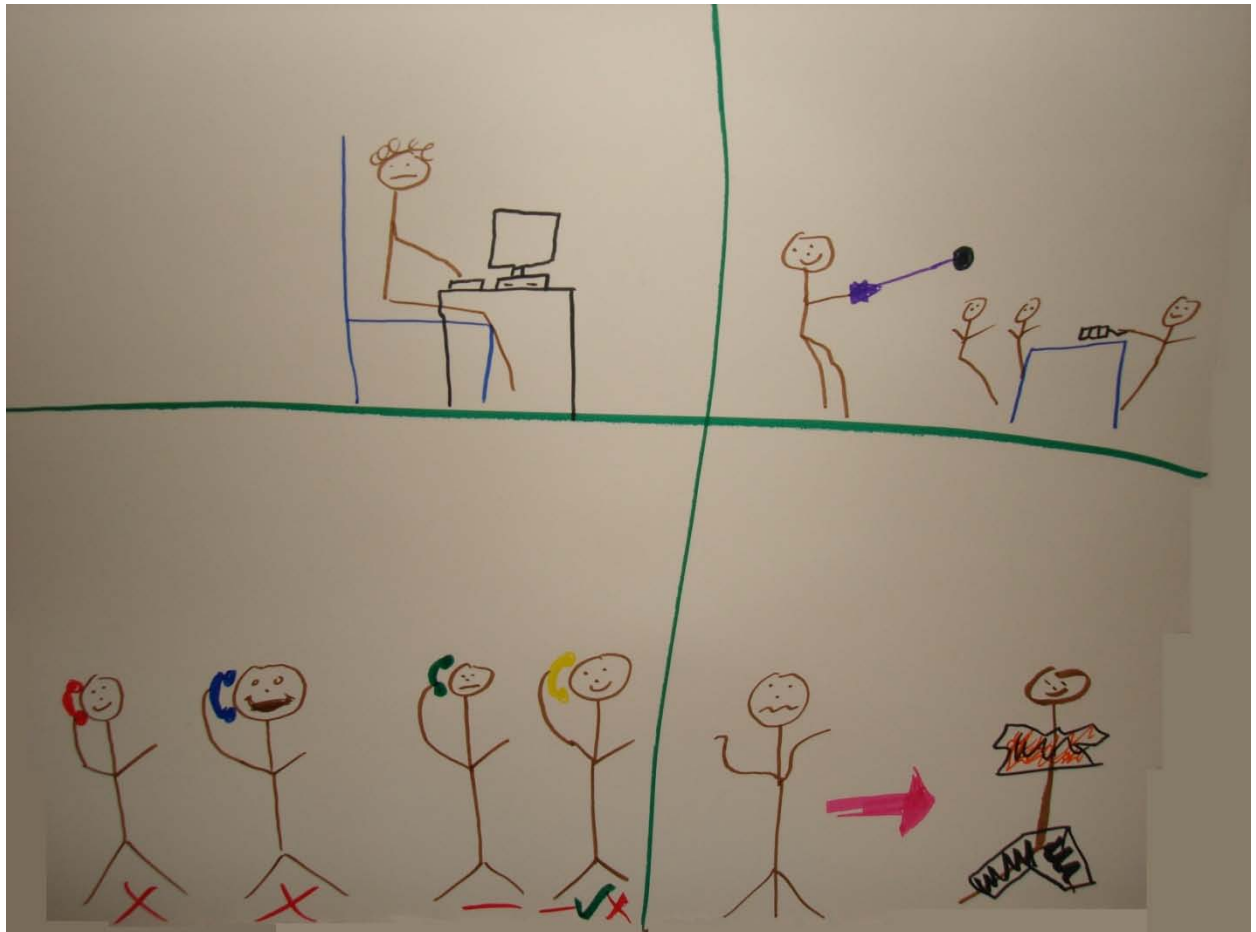


*This is me at a computer and I'm searching the internet. I was mainly searching NCAA.org… and I was like just searching for job after job after job applying for job after job after job after job. And that's me right there, that's me with this face like I'm just like, it's like a blank face like I'm searching [laughs] I'm not really, you know, I'm trying to see what's out there. This picture right here is basically me thinking of everything that's on my resume. That's like me throwing the hammer… because I put that on my resume, why would I not put that on there? And then that's me. I really didn't know how to draw but that's me being a leader because I was like on a committee, the student-athlete advisory committee. And, um, that's like the other people in the meeting because that's something else I would put on my resume, being, you know, I have leadership skills. Maybe I don't have this experience, that experience, you know specifically job related but I have like leadership experience like being a leader and also being on other committees… So, then that transitioned into this over here so basically I end up getting, um, I think I end up getting three offers, I mean that's all I can remember at the point. Like everything that I was applying for of NCAA.org and the color kind of represents the school and the "X" means no it didn't happen and that just means I didn't want it. then*

*eventually I talked to them later on before I actually said no to that, to the athletic, um, administrators actually more so one in particular, the second in command senior associate athletic director and they ended up I guess finding money for me somehow and that's why, that's what led me to this…orange, black. So now I'm a graduate assistant in strength and conditioning and I'm the SAC advisor.*

**Figure 5. Rebecca's Drawing with Associated Narrative**



*So we have the sun and the sun is rising against a little green landscape. And, um, the flowers and, it's just, it's bright to me. It's, um, I mean I guess it's just spring. It's beginning something new in my life. It's exciting. It's, um, encouraging. It has a lot of character and it's not in any way overwhelming or it's not in any way like horrible. Like, oh my God the future's coming. It's kind of like, yes the future's finally here.*

VITA

David Eric Archer

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis:   PREPARING FOR EXIT FROM SPORT: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL
EXAMINATION OF THE PRE-TRANSITION EXPERIENCES OF
DIVISION I FEMALE INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETES

Major Field:  Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Educational
Leadership and Policy Studies at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater,
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Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in Human Development
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December 2006.

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Experience:

Complex Director, University Housing and Dining Services, Western Illinois
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Marriage and Family Therapist, Focus Institute, Stillwater, Oklahoma, 2005-
        2007

Residence Hall Director, Department of Residence Life, Oklahoma State
        University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, 2003-2008

Professional Memberships: American Educational Research Association
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        College Student Educators International (ACPA), International Institute
        of Qualitative Methodology (IIQM), Student Affairs Administrators in
        Higher Education (NASPA)

Name: David Eric Archer                                  Date of Degree: July, 2010

Institution: Oklahoma State University                  Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: PREPARING FOR EXIT FROM SPORT: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL
            EXAMINATION OF THE PRE-TRANSITION EXPERIENCES OF
            DIVISION I FEMALE INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETES

Pages in Study: 199                        Candidate for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major Field: Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Scope and Method of Study:

The purpose of this study was to discover the meanings female intercollegiate athletes
ascribe to their experiences preceding exit from NCAA Division I competition. The study
sample included five Division I female intercollegiate athletes. Four of these attended a
large public research institution in the Southern Plains area of the United States (three
Caucasian and one African-American) and the fifth attended a large private religiously
affiliated university in the Midwest (Caucasian). The five athletes previously competed in
four sports – track and field, basketball, soccer, and cross country. The methodology
utilized was Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenology and the study included a
number of data collection methods including demographic profiles, participant-produced
drawings, individual phenomenological interviews, bi-weekly journal responses, and
examinations of printed and audiovisual data related to participants' sport experiences.

Findings and Conclusions:

Results from data analysis procedures yielded seven themes related to participants'
experiences in preparing to exit competitive sport. These themes included *bittersweet, on
your own, being part of a team, I will forever be an athlete, free time, it creeps up on you,*
and *they think they do a lot.* In addition to these themes, textural and structural
descriptions of experience, as well as the invariant structure of experience were
developed. Overall, athletes appeared to express both positive and negative feelings
regarding their experiences leading up to formal sport transition. Athletes also reported
on the significance of important relationships in assisting with their transition, their
struggle to adjust to a new sense of self following career termination, and the belief they
were mostly unprepared to deal with the reality of sport transition due to the prolonged
engagement with sport they experienced. Suggestions for future research included
expanding qualitative studies on athlete experience, the use of alternative qualitative
methods in sport-related research, and examining the influence of contextual factors on
athlete transition.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL:   Kerri S. Kearney