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Student-Athlete Worldview: A Qualitative Discovery of Student-Athletes' Outlook of the World through Their Athletic Experiences

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STUDENT ATHLETE WORLDVIEW: A QUALITATIVE DISCOVERY OF
STUDENT-ATHLETES’ OUTLOOK OF THE WORLD
THROUGH THEIR ATHLETIC EXPERIENCES

by

Lara Preacoo

A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology
Advisor: Mary Z. Anderson, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University
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Lara Preacco
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CHAPTER I

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

We know student-athletes face unique concerns, and while college counselors, trainers and others on college campuses are interested in helping to address those concerns, we cannot do this without first understanding who the student-athlete truly is. In the past, conceptual articles have looked at specific characteristics and challenges faced by student-athletes; theoretical perspectives have been proposed regarding the identity development of student-athletes; and the specific concept of Athletic Identity has been developed and tested through empirical research. While this has helped scholars and researchers better understand student-athletes, it has merely brushed the surface of who student-athletes truly are. It has therefore, hindered college counselors’ attempts to provide valuable counseling services to student-athletes.

In 1993, Brewer, Van Raalte and Linder believed and wrote that student-athletes have a particular aspect of self or identity, which they called Athletic Identity. They explained Athletic Identity as “the degree to which the individual identifies with the athlete role” (Brewer et al., 1993, p. 237). This concept was mainly based on the high levels of commitment that many athletes bestow to their sport, as well as the way they appear to strongly identify with the athletic role (Eldridge, 1983). Brewer et al. (1993) based their research not only on identity salience, but also on self-concept, and the fact
that individuals have a tendency to attribute their personal worth and competence to the roles they take on (Horton & Mack, 2000; Marsh, Perry, Horsely, & Roche, 1995), which in turn may affect their self-esteem, affect, and motivation, as well as career decision making, identity foreclosure, and retirement.

Though Brewer et al. (1993) identified the concept of Athletic Identity more than a decade ago, research on Athletic Identity is in its infancy. Few empirical studies have been conducted in order to better understand student-athletes around campuses, and most of the ones that have been conducted focused on only one or two aspects: the career decision making process and the retirement process. This lack of empirical studies is not the only limitation found in the research on Athletic Identity. Another important limitation is that the current conceptual articles and empirical studies focus solely on one definition of Athletic Identity, which is based on the salience and exclusivity of the athletic role for student-athletes. Thus, the present study will explore Athletic Identity further by looking at its essence, rather than simply looking at its level of salience, as existing research has done. This study will help us comprehend Athletic Identity in a more descriptive way, and therefore understand student-athletes descriptively, rather than simply by their numbers; or level of Athletic Identity. This will, in turn, help college counselors to better know student-athletes, and to provide them with more appropriate and valuable counseling services.

In the interest of better understanding and introducing the concept of “essence” of Athletic Identity, and to further our understanding of student-athletes it is useful to draw on the concept of Worldview, based on the multicultural literature, which incorporates identity related constructs as well as larger societal related constructs. In this instance,
Worldview will be applied as a theoretical postulation relating to individuals’ identities in connection to the world around them. Watts (1994) described worldview as the “pattern of beliefs, behaviors, and perceptions that is shared by a population based on similar socialization and life experiences … [Worldview] is a predisposition, not a trait; it changes substantially depending on the ecological context” (p. 52-53). The current premise is based on the idea that student-athletes have a particular aspect of self or identity, called Athletic Identity (Brewer, et al., 1993), and that college counselors need to better understand that identity in order to provide appropriate help. For that reason, it is important to gain a better understanding and awareness of the student-athletes’ view of the world, which can be done more easily by looking as student-athletes as a “particular cultural group”. Hence, the incentive to use the concept of Worldview, to conduct further research to identify and describe the attitudes, behaviors, values, and skills that student-athletes may have in common as a result of their athletic experiences.

In the multicultural literature, Worldview is defined as “how a person perceives his/her relationship to the world (nature, institutions, other people, things, etc)” (Sue, 1981, p. 17; Sue & Sue, 1990, p. 137). This could therefore encompass how student-athletes view, identify and describe themselves in terms of their athletic experiences, if and when we apply this concept to them. In addition, Sue and Sue (1990) added that “World views are not only composed of our attitudes, values, opinions, and concepts, but also they may affect how we think, make decisions, behave, and define events” (p. 137). In other words, an individual’s worldview is the framework from which he/she responds to the world. Therefore, in the last few decades, counseling psychologists, have focused their attention on better understanding their client’s and their own worldview, in an
attempt to become more effective with multicultural counseling. Consequently, individuals with differences from the dominant cultures, or non-traditional populations, can benefit from the counselors' understanding and use of those individuals' Worldview (Arredondo, 1999; Richardson & Molinaro, 1996). In this premise, for counselors to enhance student-athletes’ ability to become healthy and fulfilled college athletes and college students, it is important to gain insight and knowledge into their mind and their view of the world. Those steps will be essential in attenuating the student-athletes’ feeling of being misunderstood, and of not being on the same level with the college counselors treating them (Petitpas, Giges, & Danish, 1999).

Therefore, the purpose of this study is not to review the literature pertinent to student-athletes as a “non-traditional” population, but rather to use this “particular cultural group” premise to help us understand and describe the essence of Athletic Identity, or Student Athlete Worldview. This is important, because, as Balague (1999), a clinical and sport psychologist working primarily with athletes explained, her work and success with athletes is based mainly on the aspect of their relationship. She described it as:

Regardless of the techniques (relaxation, imagery, etc.) I may be using in working with elite athletes, understanding the larger issues of their identities and value systems and what sport and competition means to them in their lives, plays a central role in determining the quality, and probably the effectiveness, of services I deliver (Balague, 1999, p. 89).

Balague explained that her main counseling practices were derived from their athletic aspirations and performance, as well as identity and values, which, in turn, she believed,
determined their priorities. Therefore, Balague (1999) believed that any psychological intervention had to fit in the value and identity system of the athlete and/or student-athlete; or in the understanding of his/her worldview.

**Rationale**

The purpose of the present study is to learn about student-athletes’ view of the world, to discover and describe the way they perceive and experience themselves and the world through their athletic experiences. This perspective will be referred to as Student Athlete Worldview (SAWV) throughout this paper. In other words, this research will investigate, highlight and describe the core ideas and important elements, which best illustrate the essence of college athletes’ Athletic Identity. Once we have this understanding we will be able to not only know specific characteristics and uniquenesses of student-athletes, but also better understand their core foundation. This, in turn, will allow college counselors to be more effective in counseling student-athletes, and enable researchers to conduct further studies related to student-athletes’ Athletic Identity, Worldview and counseling.

**Framework of the Literature Review**

Throughout this study, “student-athletes” will denote “men and women who are enrolled in a college or university and who participate in intercollegiate sports at Division I, II, or III NCAA-member institutions … [therefore], students who participate in intramural or club sports are not included in this population” (Howard-Hamilton & Watt, 2001, p. 2). College students who do not participate in collegiate athletics will be referred to as “students” throughout this study. Also, research on Athletic Identity being in its
early years, few empirical studies, relating specifically to my study, have been conducted. Subsequently, throughout this next chapter, the literature presented is descriptive and conceptual in nature, unless explicitly specified as being empirical.

This literature review will be divided into four different sections aimed at introducing and explaining the meaning and the significance in doing research with this special population and topic. The first section will uncover and reveal important statistics, facts and pertinent information about student-athletes which will help the reader to place the population being studied into context. The second section will look at the characteristics of student-athletes and how those may influence the student-athletes to potentially behave and think a certain way, which is often different than college students who do not participate in collegiate athletics. The third section will look more specifically at the identity development of student-athletes and how they have potentially developed to think and behave the way they do, which will help the reader discover more about the different perspectives scientists have proposed to study the identity development of student-athletes. Finally, the last section will take a look specifically at the Athletic Identity of student-athletes, focusing on the few empirical studies to date that show how Athletic Identity affects student-athletes in different ways and at different levels.

Statistics about Student-Athletes

Literature suggests that student-athletes have different characteristics than college students who do not participate in collegiate athletics. In addition, there are also differences found among student-athletes depending upon division and sport. More specifically, those differences described in the development of their Athletic Identity throughout their athletic career, are believed to depend upon the sport they play, the level
of their school, or Division level, gender, race, and level of their athletic skills. The next section has been incorporated in this study to give the reader a general overview of sport in colleges and universities around the United States, in order to better understand the differences among student-athletes depending upon their gender, race, division and sport.

Statistics of National Collegiate Athletic Association

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is the organization that establishes rules and policies for colleges and universities who participate in intercollegiate athletics. Since 1906, the NCAA has provided and enforced guidelines in American colleges and universities, pertaining to “basic athletics issues such as admissions, financial aid, eligibility and recruiting” (NCAA, 2008a, p. 1). This practice was implemented in order to decrease problems such as gambling, illegal business and abuse of the athletes (NCAA, 2008a; Watt & Moore, 2001). In addition, a “basic purpose of this Association is to maintain intercollegiate athletics as an integral part of the educational program and the athlete as an integral part of the student body and, by so doing, retain a clear line of demarcation between intercollegiate athletics and professional sports.” (NCAA, 2008a, p. 1). The NCAA has implemented rules and regulations that each university has to meet in order to fit a specific Division (I, II, or III), which is reflected by the main difference in colleges’ financial resources, athletic level, and media attention. Those Divisions are specified and regulated by many criteria, however the three main conditions are the number of athletic teams that a university has, as well as the number of home games played during a regular season, and the number of other schools played which are in the same Division. In addition to those three main criteria, some additional requirements, which are often defined by quantity, are met by looking at the
number of athletic scholarships given, the sizes of the facilities, and the amount of spectators that sports in that school can bring into the stands (Howard-Hamilton & Watt, 2001; NCAA, 2008a; NCAA, 2004).

Division I athletic programs are the biggest, and the ones with more financial resources and benefits (Division III schools give no scholarships). In addition, scholars reported that student-athletes who are enrolled in athletics in a Division I school will undoubtedly be in the public eye more often than their counterparts, and receive more pressure to succeed from programs, coaches, and parents (Andersen, 2002). Student-athletes who play football, baseball, basketball, and hockey; or 

revenue sports, are pushed even more so in the media and public eye (Howard-Hamilton & Watt, 2001). Those sports bring very large sums of money to their universities and colleges, which can be a tremendous amount of pressure for those specific student-athletes. Therefore, scholars believe that one of the main differences amongst student-athletes in college is their involvement in different Division classification. In addition, student-athletes differ with respect to gender, race, ability and sport (revenue vs. non-revenue). This often influences the athletes’ hours of practice, scholarships received, media attention, the size and intensity of the academic and athletic program and many other outcomes for the student-athletes involved. All of these factors are thought to differentiate student-athletes and define different ways for them to see and understand the world around them (Watt & Moore, 2001). Furthermore, in addition to overseeing the university system attached to intercollegiate athletics, the NCAA is also responsible for the student-athletes themselves (NCAA, 2008a; Sailes, 1993).
From the NCAA’s perspective, which we will recognize throughout this study, student-athletes are defined as a student who on the first day of the team’s practice: “(a) is listed as a team member, (b) practices with the varsity team and receives coaching from one or more varsity coaches, or (c) receives athletically-related student aid” (NCAA, 2008d, p. 7). This means that students who play intramural sports on college campuses are not classified as student-athletes and are not a part of the NCAA’s organization. In order to become an athlete participating in college competition, an individual has to meet rigorous eligibility qualifications required and regulated by the NCAA. A Division II student has to have graduated from high school, have minimum requirements in math, English, and numerous other courses, and have minimum scores on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and the American College Test (ACT), of 820 and 68 respectively (NCAA, 2008b), while a Division I student “has a sliding scale for test scores and grade point average” (NCAA, 2008b, p. 1). Student-athletes also have to maintain their eligibility while in college, and therefore many rules and conditions during their collegiate athletic career are imposed (Sailes, 1993; Watt & Moore, 2001).

The NCAA has historically made many changes in the practice of college athletics in order to prevent the exploitation of collegiate athletes. One change made was that student-athletes are, for example, not allowed to sign contracts with professionals and make money from their sports, while competing for their university (Watt & Moore, 2001). The changes made by the NCAA have not always been so drastic and rigorous for student-athletes. They have also allowed the NCAA to slowly progress positively toward a more equitable repartition of gender and racial minorities amongst competing athletes, and a more equitable distribution of resources in sports and teams. They have therefore,
helped reduce the gaps that were so predominant, as far back as a few decades ago, regarding gender and cultural disparity in collegiate sport (Cogan & Petrie, 2002; Gill, 2002; NCAA, 2008a; Sailes, 1993; Watt & Moore, 2001).

Statistics of Student-Athletes’ Diversity

In the academic year 2006-2007, the NCAA through their “Sports Sponsorship and Participation Report” (2008d), reported that there were 402,793 students in American colleges and universities participating in collegiate athletics. This data reflects the total numbers of college athletes, and while female athletes have continuously increased in the last two decades, they are still in lower percentages than males around American campuses, at 42.8 percent. However, when considering this data, it is important to remember that the average number of females has been increasing, which means that male student-athletes have been in decline for the past two decades. Colleges belonging to the NCAA have, on average, 385 student-athletes, with 220 being male and 165 being female athletes. In comparison to 25 years ago, this means that today’s NCAA colleges have 66 more female student-athletes and 5 fewer male student-athletes (NCAA, 2008d). Cogan and Petrie (2002) stated that this continuous change has mainly occurred due to “Title IX”, which is a “set of federal civil rights statutes passed in 1975 to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex in education and athletics at institutions receiving federal assistance” (Howard-Hamilton & Watt, 2001, p. 4).

Other reforms introduced by the NCAA have been Proposition 48 in 1983, Proposition 42 in 1989, and finally Proposition 16 in 1995, which have allowed racial minorities, students with lower social economic status, and athletes who apply to schools who do not use SAT as a main admittance tool, to have a fair chance to apply and be
admitted as a student-athlete in a Division I college or university (FairTest, 2005; Watt & Moore, 2001). This latest reform, Proposition 16, has allowed student-athletes to meet the stringent eligibility requirements of the NCAA, by providing a sliding scale determining requirements and enrollment. For example, a student-athlete would have to have a higher GPA upon enrollment if he/she had a lower SAT score. However, that sliding scale does not come for free; student-athletes accepted using the sliding scale may only be able to have three years of eligibility and full scholarship (partial qualifier), or three years of eligibility with ineligibility for an athletic scholarship and no participation in the sport during their first year (non qualifier). All the changes made by the NCAA over time, with the help of these Proposition reforms, are allowing, non Caucasian male and female athletes, student-athletes with lower social economic status, and athletes who apply to schools who do not use SAT as a main admittance, a chance to not only pursue an athletic career, but also to excel in their education (Sailes, 1993; Watt & Moore, 2001).

Throughout history, student-athletes have been looked upon in a biased manner, often being revered as athletes while being looked upon negatively when it comes to their academic achievement, past or present. Student-athletes in general are often discredited when it comes to their academic achievements, because of the long held belief that athletes are just “dumb jocks” (Burke, 1993; Nelson, 1983; Watt & Moore, 2001). In addition, the media has tended to exacerbate the problem, by focusing more often on student-athletes’ negative behavior, rather than focusing on students who are balancing academics and athletics successfully (Burke, 1993). The dumb jock beliefs are often more strongly suggested for male athletes than female athletes; however, those attitudes are not based on any empirical research or information that can be trusted. In contrast, recent
data seem to suggest that ideas about student-athletes being nothing more than a body without a brain may be unfounded. The main statistics gathered by the NCAA, since 1983, revolves around graduation rates, which can be a good indicator of successful academic achievement. Those figures seem to suggest that athletes are not only not dumb, but that they are as dedicated or more, than other students to their academic careers. In 1998, student-athletes had a comparable GPA and a slightly higher graduation rate than other students. More specifically, 58% of college athletes from a Division I program graduated from college, which was 2% higher than students in general for that same graduation year (Sailes, 1993; Watt & Moore, 2001). The last report from the NCAA, suggested that student-athletes are graduating at increasingly higher percentages and are far more likely to graduate than students. More specifically, 78% of college athletes from a Division I program graduated from college (NCAA, 2008c). Those numbers are surprising, especially to individuals, such as professors and fellow students, who often believe that student-athletes do not perform with the same motivation in academics as they do in athletics (Burke, 1993; Nelson, 1983; Watt & Moore, 2001).

The numbers stated above were further examined by the NCAA, in 1998 for a Division I school, and scholars reported that the difference between male and female student-athletes’ graduation rate was astonishing. The graduation rate for male athletes was 52% and 68% for female athletes. In addition, Caucasian male student-athletes graduated at a rate of 58% which was very close to the general rate for Caucasian male students with 57%. Another astonishing difference was the 40% graduation rate for African American male student-athletes, while African American male students were only averaging 31%. The gaps between female student-athletes and female students are
even larger. Caucasian female student-athletes’ graduation rate is 71% while Caucasian
girl student rate is only 61%. Close to that gap is the African American female
student-athletes’ 53% graduation rate, as compared with 41% for African American
female students (Sailes, 1993; Watt & Moore, 2001). The last report from the NCAA
(2008c) reported that the difference between male and female student-athletes’
graduation rate was still astounding, at 71% for male student-athletes and 86% for female
student-athletes. While graduation rates across women’s sports are constant, men’s
revenue sports show a lower trend, with graduations rates in the lower 60’s. Therefore,
graduation rates are gradually climbing over the years, while still showing a big
difference between men and women student-athletes, as well as lower numbers for men’s
revenue sports. Those statistics do not seem to fit the dumb jock and stereotype myth;
these statistics seem to push against the stereotype, and seem to propose that the myth of
the dumb jock may not be as accurate as we once thought.

The NCAA (2008d) has also compiled statistics for various Divisions and sports.
These numbers suggested that student-athletes in revenue sports have slowly been
decreasing their graduation rate. Therefore, while the overall student-athlete body has
increased their graduation rate since 1983, graduation rates for student-athletes
competing in sports such as football, baseball, basketball, and hockey have decreased. As
for the different Divisions, the NCAA reported that student-athletes who belong to a
Division III school have a much higher graduation rate than their Division I and II
counterparts. Looking at Division III specifically, these numbers are even higher when
looking at student-athletes, whose graduation rates are much higher, 76%, than that of
students, 60%. The difference between Division I and Division II student-athletes
graduation is very similar, with Division I student-athletes reaching graduation slightly more often than students in Division II. These numbers suggest that athletic participation in college could be a factor in academic success and mainly persisting toward graduation, especially for African American females and males, and Caucasian female athletes. In addition it is important to remember that those positive academic results occur more often for student-athletes who are in non-revenue sports such as volleyball, tennis, swimming and softball, as well as for student-athletes who participate in Division III collegiate sport (Howard-Hamilton & Watt, 2001; Watt & Moore, 2001).

**Summary**

The basic differences identified across division, sport, gender, race, and level of athletic skills, are important to remember throughout this dissertation, as I will look at how student-athletes have a different view on life; or distinct view of the world, as well as different ways to deal with issues and problems they may face, than other college students may have. These differences in perceiving and experiencing the world are believed to be based on the high levels of commitment that many student-athletes bestow to their sport, as well as the way they seem to strongly identify with their athletic role or identity (Brewer et al., 1993; Eldridge, 1983). More known characteristics and perspectives unique to student-athletes will be explored and discussed in the next section of this literature review.

**Characteristics of Student-Athletes**

Danish, Petitpas, and Hale (1993) proposed that in competitive sports, athletes are often taught that the smallest error and/or defeat is a failure, that showing one's emotions
during practice or an athletic event is a sign of weakness, and that not concentrating at least one hundred percent on one’s goal will undoubtedly lead to the end of their career.

Scholars believe that before arriving at college, many student-athletes have spent a great part of their lives thinking in the ways mentioned above, and have therefore developed a mentality that is quite different from the mentality college students, who do not engage in collegiate athletics, would develop throughout their lifetime pre-college (Danish et al., 1993; Grant & Darley, 1993). Therefore, scholars have proposed that student-athletes develop an identity that is special to their group of individuals; that is special to athletes. In the course of that development, they may well have lived in a world with a different and unique set of norms, beliefs and patterns of interaction. They may have believed themselves to be stronger, faster, and better than their average and traditional peers. Therefore, they may have gradually begun to perceive themselves as great athletes; as incredible athletes. In a never-ending circle, they may have continued to behave in a way that is consistent with how they believe an athlete should behave. Therefore, those young individuals, when reaching the college level, may have developed into full-grown individuals with a different and special identity, as well as a distinct view of the world (Balague, 1999; Chartrand & Lent, 1987; Hill, Burch-Ragan, & Yates, 2001).

Differences and Characteristics of the Student-Athlete

As Todd Blackledge, a quarterback from Pennsylvania State University, so eloquently said: “We’re different” (Shriberg & Brodzinski, 1984, p. 1). He also added “Most students just have to balance academics with their social life. We have to do that and then compete” (Shriberg & Brodzinski, 1984, p. 1). At last, he expressed the pressures associated with being a student-athlete: “we’re more visible and more in the
spotlight” (Shriberg & Brodzinski, 1984, p. 1). Parham (1993) describes clearly the special challenges that student-athletes need to confront every day, in addition to the normal challenges that students face each day during their college experience. He believes that the common developmental changes and challenges that these two groups meet are:

(a) developing and strengthening a set of personal competencies (academic, social, intrapersonal) that will enable them to bring about a greater degree of mastery and control over their environment, (b) solidifying their identities as individuals separate from their families and communities, (c) discovering and creating ways to nurture interpersonal and intimate relationships, (d) coming to terms with a set of beliefs and behaviors that are consistent with their emerging values and moral and ethical standards, and (e) formulating career goals and, ultimately, deciding to pursue a vocational path that is both satisfying and personally rewarding (Parham, 1993, p. 411-412)

He also describes the extra challenges that student-athletes encounter:

(a) learning to balance academic and athletic pursuits, (b) adapting to a certain degree of isolation from social and more “mainstream” activities, (c) managing success or lack thereof, (d) attending to their own physical health in a more deliberate way so as to minimize injury and subsequent rehabilitation, (e) satisfying multiple relationships, including those having to do with coaches, parents, friends, and community, and (f) terminating an athletic career and finding other activities in which participation will
bring about a very similar, if not a more heightened level of satisfaction
(Parham, 1993, p. 412)

This identifies the many changes that a student faces when moving from home into a new setting, such as college. It also suggests how much more enormous the task is for the student-athlete who comes to college, with the idea of becoming an athletic star (Chartrand & Lent, 1987; Lanning, 1982).

Scholars, such as Brewer et al. (1993), have believed that athletes tend to live a lifestyle that is much more structured, organized, and self-controlled than many of their peers. This kind of lifestyle is thought to be even more pronounced in very successful athletes who are capable of eliminating many of the distractions, which they may encounter in day-to-day life. It is also believed that they have the willingness to commit and concentrate only on their sport, and the numerous responsibilities that go along with it, which will lead to their maximum athletic performance and ability (Grant & Darley, 1993; Lanning & Toye, 1993; Williams, Anshel, & Quek, 1997). Chartrand and Lent (1987; Lent, 1993), as well as Hale, James, and Stambulova (1999) and Balague (1999) expanded this concept to an even larger view. They suggested that not only do athletes and student-athletes identify themselves completely with their role in order to become more competitive; they also believed that the more the athlete identified him/herself with that role, the more disappointed he/she would be when he/she does not succeed. This would mean that athletes who hold a strong Athletic Identity are usually the best athletes in their field; however they also would probably be the ones who are more prone to vulnerability and emotional difficulties (Brewer et al., 1993). This is thought to be due to the fact that these particular student-athletes believe that their athletic performance,
during practice as well as during sporting events, defines who they are and who they will be.

This is an extremely harsh way to look at oneself, especially because empirical research has found that less than two percent of all the student-athletes, who further their athletic career by attending college, will eventually be able to continue their sport as professionals (Lee, 1983). This is one of the main concerns that counselors and college services have been aware of, as well as the difficulty student-athletes may have in dealing with and juggling their athletic and academic roles (Chartrand & Lent, 1987; Grant & Darley, 1993; Jordan & Denson, 1990; Petitpas, Brewer, & Van Raalte, 1996). Parham (1993) described that student-athletes had to face greater challenges than other students. The literature cited above, has proposed that the two most important problems are role conflict, between academia and athletics, and athletic retirement. While the NCAA has continuously been fighting to decrease the hours that student-athletes have to put into their sport, and has tried to maintain a balanced schedule between academics and athletics by enforcing rules such as having one day off per week, no more than four hours of practice per day, and 20 hours per week, it has always been a challenge for the coaches to maintain those numbers and for the student-athletes to juggle with them (Carodine, Almond, & Gratto, 2001).

Challenges of the Student-Athlete

Further scholarly work has also suggested that the unique challenges faced by student-athletes may also contribute to other difficulties such as: “time management, study skills problems, limited peer relationships, lack of career and social development opportunities, and restricted self-concept or basis for self-worth” (Chartrand & Lent,
1987, p. 164). Stress also seems to be an important issue faced everyday by student-athletes. This could be the stress due to poor and unpleasant relationships with a coach, and/or a teammate. It could also be the stress due to not performing adequately during a sporting event, or during daily practices, or simply the stress of overcoming a physical injury (Petitpas et al., 1996). Anshel, Kim, Kim, Chang, and Eom (2001) suggested that when left untreated, stress can develop into more serious symptoms such as anxiety and depression. In the long term, these symptoms could lead to “mental withdrawal, reduced participation, satisfaction and performance, less interest in academic achievement and often dropping out of a sport” (Anshel et al., 2001, p. 45).

While all student-athletes are prone to these kinds of issues and stressors, the student-athletes who identify more with their Athletic Identity are believed to have a higher tendency to experience difficulties. When these difficulties arise, it is common to see student-athletes use maladaptive skills in order to try to feel better, and more in control (less helpless). Lacking many of the skills students may have developed during their youth, student-athletes are believed to experience excessive anger, aggression, depression, drug and/or alcohol use/abuse, and over/under eating (Anshel et al., 2001; Hale et al., 1999; Jordan & Denson, 1990). It is important to remember that student-athletes are not only trying to deal with the unique stressors associated with participating in sports; they are also:

Equally as likely as their college peers to struggle with the full array of concerns and issues that are common to this age group such as depression, thoughts of suicide, anxiety, loneliness, dysfunctional family experiences, child abuse,

Literature reported that often student-athletes are looked upon as superstars and role models who should be better and stronger than the common mortal. This is often believed to be in contradiction to their “dumb jock” academic persona. This makes it even harder for the student-athlete to let him/herself believe that showing weakness is ok. Scholars believe that to the contrary, it tends to push the student-athlete even further into his/her isolation and withdrawal. This is reflected in student-athlete’s lack of regard for counseling services. Many student-athletes believe that those services are for the weak and the frail individual. This behavior is believed to often be reinforced by the public, coaching staff, and athletic department (Lanning & Toye, 1993; Petitpas et al., 1996; Van Raalte, Brewer, Linder, & DeLange, 1990). More research and contact between the athletic staff and college counselors is needed to change this perception and better understand the student-athletes’ distinct view of the world.

Diversity of the Student-Athlete

Earlier in this section, I presented descriptive literature indicating the many changes and difficulties that student-athletes may face when moving from home into a new setting such as college. For student-athletes who are not Caucasian males, this transition was believed to be an even bigger task, because colleges were predominantly for Caucasians, and athletes were predominantly male. While this generalization has been decreasing over the years, literature has often suggested that in their beginning colleges where built for healthy white men, and that sport was not for women (Burke, 1993; Cogan & Petrie, 2002; Greenspan & Andersen, 1995). Limited studies have been
conducted on multiculturalism with student-athletes, and it is therefore hard to draw powerful conclusions. However, a few scholars have gathered some basic information which is important to reveal and be aware of, in order to make informed decisions concerning student-athletes (Cogan & Petrie, 2002).

**Gender**

The ancient Greeks believed that women should not compete and play sport, in order to not undermine their femininity; therefore “early sport was developed by men for men” (Burke, 1993, p. 95). This mentality, while being surpassed, is still current in the 21st century. Literature suggest that women and girls often feel stigmatized by random individuals, the media, coaches and parents about sport not being a very feminine thing to do. Women and girls are taught to be nurturing, loving, caring and cooperative, while men and boys are taught to be tough, independent and competitive. Therefore, it is suggested that to not become overwhelmed by a feeling of maladjustment by participating in the world of sport, women often tend to try to change themselves in order to fit that undefined and unclear goal of being athletic without being overly physical (Burke, 1993; Cogan & Petrie, 2002).

Empirical research found that, throughout their childhood years, girls’ self esteem is often lower than boys’, especially regarding physical activity. Scholars hypothesized that social pressures may be at the source of these negative self assessments, rather than lower physical aptitudes. As women reach high school and college, scholars suggested that cultural differences may start entering into the equation, and empirical research found that African American women have a higher self esteem than Caucasian women and African American men. Scholars believed that for Caucasian women, these attitudes
evolved throughout adolescence, and girls often found themselves choosing between athletics and academics, which often led them to experience uncertainty, conflict and anxiety toward having to make that decision when asked to participate in collegiate athletics. However, empirical data also indicated that, while their self esteem is lower than male student-athletes, female student-athletes still have a higher self concept than male and female students who do not participate in collegiate sports (Cogan & Petrie, 2002).

Women in sport are also faced with stereotypes based on the type of sport they may play or want to play. Literature reported that sports such as basketball, softball, and track and field are looked upon as unfeminine sports and the athletes who associate with them are often questioned about their sexual orientation. Other female athletes who participate in sports such as gymnastics, diving, tennis, and swimming are thought to have an easier time making relationships with the opposite sex, and may not be teased or viewed as deviant for participating in college athletics. In addition, literature reported that female student-athletes threatened by being labeled as lesbians will often take an extra step to appear more feminine than they normally would, by adding makeup, jewelry, long hair, nail polish, and trying to not have bulky muscles. Therefore, again female athletes seem hesitant and ambiguous about their role as athletes and women (Burke, 1993; Cogan & Petrie, 2002).

Finally, descriptive literature suggested that, it is also often an adjustment for women to participate in college sports, due to the fact that very few of the coaching or administrative positions may be held by female staff. In addition, female student-athletes may have very little chance and expectations to work in athletics and may therefore have
much less expectations than their male counterparts, of a career in sport. While there is a negative aspect to this, scholars believe that this also means that female student-athletes may develop a stronger career decision making process and put less pressure and ultimatum on their athletic role and identity in order to compete at a professional level. This in turn, scholars have pointed out, is believed to make them experience less identity foreclosure than their male counterparts (Burke, 1993; Cogan & Petrie, 2002).

Race

Scholars suggest that, African American male student-athletes have a similar experience to female student-athletes when it comes to experiencing people of color on campuses and in leadership roles in athletics and in academics. African American student-athletes often enroll at predominantly white universities, where athletic and academic staff members are unprepared to deal with minorities. In addition, scholars believe that African American student-athletes may often suffer the double standards of being seen, by students and professors, not only as a dumb jock but also as a minority who may have been accepted into college with substandard requirements. Therefore student-athletes of color may often feel lonely, isolated, and alienated, as well as pressured to fit the white mold (Cogan & Petrie, 2002; Greenspan & Andersen, 1995; Scales, 1991).

Literature reported that African American male student-athletes experience prejudice and discrimination in many ways in college settings. While student-athletes of color are overwhelmingly present in some sports such as football, baseball, and basketball, they are still underrepresented in the areas of coaching and administrative positions, in those same sports. Therefore, African American athletes often have to
interact with Caucasian coaches and coaching staff, who may not fully understand their uniqueness and their full identity. The literature suggests that student-athletes of color interact amongst each other and with others in a different way than white student-athletes interact amongst themselves. Therefore, the demands for African American males to interact with white teammates and coaches may be difficult for coaches to grasp, in addition to being difficult for African American males to adjust to (Cogan & Petrie, 2002; Greenspan & Andersen, 1995; Kirk & Kirk, 1993; Scales, 1991).

Another important piece is the myth of sports, such as football and basketball, being a vehicle for social mobility for the African American male student-athlete. Scholars suggest that, this belief is strongly engrained in athletes’ minds and pushes them to focus on athletics rather than academics. This would mean that African American male student-athletes may often focus solely on their Athletic Identity to the detriment of other important roles. Therefore, by the time they arrive at the end of their college years, those athletes may be prone to disappointment as well as a rude awakening to reality, which may in turn leave them ill equipped to formulate other career decisions (Kirk & Kirk, 1993). As an illustration, Sailes (1990) described it well, when he said:

If the African American male is successful in sport, particularly if he becomes a sports star, the rewards are social prestige, recognition, and status. College scholarship offers, usually find the most talented, gifted African American athletes. Unfortunately, over 75% of Black athletes playing NCAA Division I basketball and football never graduate and fewer than 1% ever sign a professional sports contract (p. 6).
The differences seen for African American student-athletes, as well as Caucasian female student-athletes are important to recognize and remember, as we continue to reflect on and explore the literature on Athletic Identity. It is especially important to keep in mind that in 1972, African American protests attained their peak in the collegiate sport history. At that time, the areas of concerns were the fact that (1) black athletes were being discriminated against, (2) a large number of African American athletes did not graduate college, in contrast to their white counterparts, and (3) there was a lack of African American representation in leadership positions in intercollegiate athletics. After more than 30 years, it important to realize that while those problems have been reduced, they have not been resolved, and minorities are still requesting changes in those areas (Kirk & Kirk, 1993).

Summary

The descriptive literature about collegiate student-athletes portrays them as often perceiving themselves as being stronger, faster, and better than their college peers. Scholars believe that this view begins to develop early in their athletic career. By the time athletes start college, they can be seen as experiencing challenges in balancing academia and athletics, as well as having limited peer relationship, lack of career and social development, and a restricted self-concept or basis for self-worth. The concept of Athletic Identity has been used to describe variation in the level of importance individuals place on their role as athletes and to examine various developmental outcomes for student-athletes. The literature also suggests that discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes are still present today. While it is more pronounced for African American male student-athletes, it is also believed to play an important part in the formation of Caucasian and
African American female’s Athletic Identity. Those inequities form and shape those individuals’ self esteem, self concepts, and ultimately their self identity. However, it is also important to remember that those differences and distinctions from their Caucasian male counterparts are only a few of the different characteristics that student-athletes in general have when compared to college students. An additional difference amongst students and student-athletes is defined by their identity development throughout their life.

Identity Development of Student-Athletes

Scholars believe that, the unique experiences of student-athletes influence their broader development. This has been investigated and understood specifically within the context of identity development as this is the major developmental task of all college age students (Coleman, 1991). Scholars have mainly used a psychosocial developmental perspective, a socialization perspective and a social role theory perspective to understand the development of student-athletes. While all those scholars increased the knowledge and understanding of student-athletes identity development, social role theorists were the ones who used the applications of those ideas, which further led to development of the construct of: Athletic Identity (Brewer et al., 1993).

Scholars with a psychosocial developmental perspective, such as Erickson (1980) and Chickering (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) explored the importance of balance between academics, athletics and personal college life for students and student-athletes. They also highlighted the importance of autonomy, as well as role and identity exploration, for students in college to develop into healthy individuals. Early findings suggest that, this is often integrated with the sense that student-athletes will be more
likely to experience foreclosure if they do not experience and dedicate themselves to those diverse aspects of self-exploration (Hale et al., 1999).

Scholars with a socialization perspective looked at the development of identity as a balance that individuals have to attain between their personal and social identity (Anshel, 1990). Studies suggest that it is often hard, for some groups of individuals more than others, because society has shifted its sports' focus into a strong competitive vs. recreational aspect of life (Coleman, 1991). The early interactionists, such as James, Stryker, and Hoelter discussed the importance of identity salience and commitment to that identity, which was later acknowledged as an important tool in the study of sport behavior (Adler & Adler, 1987; Fine, 1986; Snyder, 1985).

Ultimately, social role theory scholars, integrated those ideas with social role theory and proposed the concept of Athletic Identity as “the degree to which the individual identifies with the athlete role” (Brewer et al., 1993, p. 237), which they based not only on identity salience, but also an athlete’s personal self-concept. Brewer et al. (1993) also developed the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) to measure the level of Athletic Identity.

This next section will present and discuss the historical development of Athletic Identity from the three theoretical perspectives cited above: psychosocial development theory, socialization theory and social role theory. It will also review the empirical literature based on each of those theoretical perspectives, and finally review the development of the construct and the measurement of Athletic Identity.
Psychosocial Developmental Perspective

Scholars have occasionally pursued the subject of self and identity for student-athletes from a developmental perspective. Recently, they have started to focus more intentionally on intercollegiate student-athletes and their identity formation (Evans, 1996; Miller & Kerr, 2003; Rotella & Newburg, 1989). This is important, because as Ferrante and Etzel (1991) suggested student-athletes need to focus on challenges related to three areas of their life: academic, athletic and personal. This means that they need to perform well in classes and deal with any burnout or injury in their sports. In addition, student-athletes need to experience an enjoyable and balanced personal life while in college. Scholars believe that in order to develop in a healthy manner, student-athletes need to keep a balance between those three activities. Scholars have used developmental theories such as those proposed by Erickson (1980) and Chickering (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) to try to explain and investigate identity formation for individuals whose role is predominantly influenced by athletics, and therefore not balanced equitably between those three important areas of their development. Psychosocial theories explore “the content of development, the important issues people face as their lives progress, such as how to define themselves, their relationships with others, and what to do with their lives” (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998, p. 32).

The literature suggests that, the typical student-athlete attends college during late adolescence, which is a period when it is developmentally appropriate for individuals to explore many role identities, rather than focus principally on a single identity such as their Athletic Identity (Evans, 1996; Miller & Kerr, 2003; Rotella & Newburg, 1989). Most theorists also believe that exploration of many roles is not only normal, but also
necessary for developing a unique sense of self. In addition, they believe that during this period, all identities, even the most prominent ones, are flexible and fluid due to the fact that they take place during a time when individuals’ development provides them with the opportunity to try out many different roles. In contrast, researchers have reported that in order to increase personal worth and competence, as well as self-esteem and performance, athletes may have a tendency to neglect identity formation and exploration and purposefully focus on their major and almost unique role, their Athletic Identity, which as a result lacks fluidity and flexibility (Hale et al., 1999; Miller & Kerr, 2003; Rotella & Newburg, 1989).

Erickson’s theory is based on the fact that a healthy individual, athlete or not, will have developed by successfully moving through the eight stages he described as (1) sense of trust vs. mistrust, (2) sense of autonomy vs. shame, (3) sense of initiative vs. guilt, (4) sense of industry vs. inferiority, (5) sense of identity vs. identity diffusion or role confusion, (6) sense of intimacy vs. isolation, (7) sense of generativity vs. self-absorption, and (8) sense of integrity vs. despair (Erickson, 1980). All scholars studying college students have focused most on the 4th and 5th stages, because those represent the time and changes that college students go through and that student-athletes confront the most during their athletic career (Coleman, 1991; Harris, 1993; Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001).

Consistent with Erickson’s theory, student-athletes in their younger years will have to either develop a sense of industry or inferiority. The literature suggests that by the time they reach college, successful student-athletes have often developed a strong sense of accomplishment and industry (Coleman, 1991; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). They may
have been able to develop a strong self-esteem, at least in their physical abilities, and somewhat in their academic achievements. They may have also reached a sense of industry in building their relationships with coaches, other players and teammates. Therefore, the literature suggests that this stage of development is more often than not being achieved by athletes and student-athletes during their earlier years (Danish et al., 1993; Harris, 1993; Howard-Hamilton & Sina, 2001; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990).

However, it must also be remembered that the literature assumes this to be true for successful athletes, because less gifted athletes, the ones with fewer abilities in sport, would probably drop out and therefore achieve a somewhat lower level of self-esteem and industry than their successful counterparts (Petitpas, 2002). In addition, sports in today's society are believed to push young athletes to focus on competition and winning rather than fun and enjoyment. Therefore, Gould (1987) suggested that a sense of industry is more easily achieved if the focus of youth sport is on mastery of skills and fun, rather than competition.

According to scholars, the next important stage for college student-athletes is the one in which they develop their sense of identity. This stage is important in the development of the healthy individual, in order not to suffer from role confusion. Literature is twofold in this area. First, it suggests that student-athletes are able to reach a great sense of self, and therefore achieve a strong personal identity (Harris, 1993). On the other hand, it also suggests that those same student-athletes are lacking role exploration and have therefore prematurely fixated on a specific role/identity, and are thus experiencing identity foreclosure (Hurley & Cunningham, 1984). Erickson's professional argument was that to develop in a healthy manner, it is important for individuals first to
explore the multiple roles that they could follow and to look specifically at the ones that may fit them (Harris, 1993). Then, it is important for those individuals to commit to those roles, in order to develop a healthy sense of efficacy in the multiple roles connected with that individual’s “values, needs, interests, and skills” (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990, p. 8).

Chickering declared that establishing one’s identity is the most important aspect of development for the college student (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Chickering’s theory is built on Erickson’s theory, and is based on the fact that a healthy individual, athlete or not, will be healthy by successfully going through seven vectors; or seven important passages in their life. In this instance, Harris (1993) believed that, four of those seven vectors are more relevant to student-athletes, and can be looked at more specifically, because of their importance in the development of Athletic Identity. Those four vectors, which are continuously re-examined and re-explored by the individual, are first (I) “Developing Autonomy, (I a) instrumental and emotional autonomy, interdependence” (Harris, 1993, p. 5). The second one (II) is “Developing mature Interpersonal Relationships, (II a) tolerance, relationships with peers and with members of the opposite sex” (Harris, 1993, p. 5). The third one (III) is:

Establishing Identity, (III a) a positive identity includes (1) comfort with body and appearance, (2) comfort with gender and sexual orientation, (3) a sense of one’s social and cultural heritage, (4) a clear conception of self and comfort with one’s roles and lifestyles, (5) a secure sense of self in light of feedback from significant others, (6) self-acceptance and self-esteem, and (7) personal stability and integration (Evans, 1996, p. 169).
Finally, the last one is (IV) "Developing Purpose, (IV a) appropriate educational plans, career plans, lifestyle plans" (Harris, 1993, p. 5).

The literature suggests that it is important in one's development to become independent and autonomous. This is often believed to be the case for students when they come to college. While they often still depend on their parents for financial, emotional, and other forms of support, there is often a slow detachment from them. For student-athletes, this step is believed to often be less pronounced than students. Scholars believe that student-athletes' collegiate infrastructure is often so well developed, especially for Division I universities, and especially for revenue sports, that coaches and athletic departments seem to continue to hold the role of the parents for the athlete. Therefore, it can be more difficult, for student-athletes to become not only independent but also able to self-navigate in a non-rigid self-leading environment" (Harris, 1993).

Scholars believe that student-athletes have great opportunities to develop mature interpersonal relationships. This is especially believed to be true in Division I schools, where teams are often made up of a more multicultural and diverse groups of athletes. Those experiences are believed to often lead the student-athletes to become more open and aware of others' differences and similarities. However, the literature described student-athletes as often doing their own thing, habitually in a somewhat restricted area of campus, and therefore interacting mostly with other student-athletes. Scholars believe that this, in turn, tends to lead other groups on campus to become suspicious, and therefore have some negative perceptions and stereotypes about those athletes. This is believed to further isolate student-athletes, particularly African American student-athletes. In a vicious circle, this leads them to reduce their exploration of the collegiate
experience and further increase their isolation. This information also suggests that at least some student-athletes may not have an equitable balance of personal experiences, with academics and athletics (Harris, 1993).

Finally, Chickering believes that an individual needs to explore career options, in order to have a constructive career decision making process when the collegiate experience ends. The literature suggests that young adults also need to learn to determine a course of action in order to pursue their career decisions. However, scholars believe that student-athletes are lead by coaches and athletic departments to focus so much on their athletic careers, that those student-athletes are not equipped to make career-related decisions. This is especially believed to be true for African American student-athletes and for athletes who participate in revenue sport, in Division I schools (Harris, 1993).

It is important to remember that student-athletes cannot develop into healthy individuals, according to Erickson and Chickering’s theories, if they focus solely on one role, their athletic role. This is believed to be especially true if and when the parents, coaches and the college setting drive the student-athletes to concentrate only on one activity: their sport. This mentality reduces the chances for the developing young individuals to explore and practice with different roles, and therefore may lead them to premature identity foreclosure (Andersen, 2002; Coleman, 1991; Petitpas, 2002). This high level of athletic involvement and low level of exploration is believed to lead student-athletes to develop high Athletic Identity. Scholars acknowledge that, this in turn, may well mean more successful athletes, but may also result in more difficulties in other life areas, such as career decision making and athletic retirement. This is seen more often for revenue sports, as well as for males, for whom it is more socially acceptable and even

**Socialization Perspective**

The conceptual understanding of socialization is explained by Coakley (2004) as: An active process of learning and social development, which occurs as we interact with one another and become acquainted with the social world in which we live. It involves the formation of ideas about who we are and what is important in our lives (p. 98).

Others, such as Anshel (1990) define socialization as “the process by which society communicates to an individual the kind of person that he or she is expected to be” (p. 363). Finally, Weiss and Glenn (1992) defined it as “the process whereby individuals learn the skills, values, norms and behaviors enabling them to function competently in many different social roles within their group or culture” (p. 140). Hence, socialization looks at the development of identity as a balance that individuals have to attain between their personal and social identity. Therefore, scholars believe that student-athletes would grow and develop into healthy individuals by successfully balancing their personal roles. According to Erickson and Chickering’s theories, this equilibrium was based on exploring and discovering the multiple roles that one can fit, and by balancing their social roles, which are often communicated through parents, teachers, coaches, medias, cultures, philosophies of country, and all the social expectations associated with those (Anshel, 1990; Brettschneider & Heim, 1997; Coakley, 2004; Cogan & Petrie, 2002).

Scholars have looked at socialization from different perspectives, however, few studies have specifically looked at Athletic Identity and socialization together. In the
world of sport, socialization has often been studied in regard to youth sport and its effects on children. The main train of thought in children’s socialization is the continual differentiation in viewing athletic activity as either play, games, or sports, and therefore to look at sport as competitive versus recreational (Coakley, 2004; Coleman, 1991). Coleman (1991) clearly illustrated this “developmental sequencing and control of play, games and sports” (p. 118), with the help of this diagram:

![Diagram of Developmental Sequencing and Control of Play, Games and Sports](image)

(Coleman, 1991, p.118)

Figure 1. Developmental Sequencing and Control of Play, Games and Sports.

Some scholars believe that sport builds character, by means of competition, achievement, motivation, assertiveness, rules and fair play. Others believe that sport
helps develop a healthy individual, through skill development, enjoyment, being part of a group, and excitement. Today's society, particularly in North America, has continuously been pushing individuals to drift in the direction of the competitive; or power and performance model, that Coakley (2004) has so clearly introduced. This suggests that most of the people in today's society believe that sport should be defined by and played for extrinsic factors, such as winning, being the best, beating others, and competing against others. This model conveys to athletes and student-athletes that winning is the most important thing in sport, not pleasure. The recreational; or pleasure and participation model, which is followed by the minority of individuals in today's society, describes sport form as playing with each other, personal empowerment, and support of others (Coakley, 2004; Coleman, 1991).

This conceptual perspective suggest that today's society is leading athletes in their youth to focus on domination of others by all means, which is often not the first goal that young people have when they start participating in a sport. The first goal of small children often revolves around components related to recreational sport. However, society continues to push them to win and celebrates them skillfully when this behavior occurs. Therefore, scholars make the argument that this may lead the athlete to continue to pursue extrinsic, rather than intrinsic rewards, which society continues to reward. This in turn may lead younger athletes and student-athletes at the college level to yearn for a strong focus on their sport and a high level of Athletic Identity, in order to achieve the goal that society has "told" them to achieve. Finally, scholars believe that this would most likely lead student-athletes to develop a lower level of role exploration, and
therefore to have more difficulties with experiences leading to career decision making and retirement (Brettschneider & Heim, 1997; Coakley, 2004; Coleman, 1991).

The literature suggests that those difficulties are seen more often in males than females, as girls often feel stigmatized by parents, coaches, and the media for not being nurturing, loving, caring and cooperative when playing certain sports. In contrast, males are often challenged to be tough, independent and competitive no matter what the cost. Therefore, men are believed to try to change themselves in order to fit that somewhat undefined and unclear goal of wanting to be athletic; wanting to become the best. This striving for winning at all costs is often detrimental for children who do not want to abide by society’s role and wish to continue playing their sport in a recreational way. The literature suggests that this can be more hurtful for boys and men, because they may be expected to behave competitively, rather than pledge to recreation sports. For girls and women, it is often harder to thrive in somewhat manly sports, as society views them as more recreational athletes (Anshel, 1990; Coakley, 2004; Cogan & Petrie, 2002; Coleman, 1991).

*Social Role Theory Perspective*

Social role theory is based on the work of James (1950) who believed that our selves are defined by our social roles. He further suggested that we have as many selves as we do social groups and that we place different degrees of importance on each of those selves (Adler & Adler, 1987; Brown & Hartley, 1998; Hoelter, 1983). Stryker (1968, 1980, 1982) elaborated on these ideas and proposed that the salience of an identity is based on the degree to which one is dedicated to that particular role. In other words, he believed that identity is based on “the probability of invocation” (Hoelter, 1983, p. 141)
and that "identities are considered to be hierarchically ordered in terms of their probability of being invoked in a given situation" (Hoelter, 1983, p. 141). Other important parts of this theory are that identity salience is operationalized as "the importance or centrality of a given identity, commitment to an identity, and self-appraisal and social comparisons of that identity" (Hoelter, 1983, p. 141). Therefore, with its structure based mainly on commitment to and level of one’s identity, identity salience was recognized as an important and useful tool in the study of sport behavior (Adler & Adler, 1987; Fine, 1986; Snyder, 1985).

Beginning in the 1990s, Brewer et al. (1993) used the idea of identity salience in a more applied manner in sport psychology. From those studies, they developed the concept of Athletic Identity and defined it as "the degree to which the individual identifies with the athlete role" (Brewer et al., 1993, p. 237). Again, this concept was mainly based on the high levels of commitment that many athletes bestow to their sport, as well as the way they seemed to strongly identify with the athletic role (Eldridge, 1983). Brewer et al. (1993) based their conceptual and empirical research not only on identity salience, but also on self-concept, and the fact that individuals seem to have a tendency to attribute their personal worth and competence to the roles they take on, which in turn may affect their self-esteem, affect, and motivation (Horton & Mack, 2000; Marsh et al., 1995).

However, as other scientists have also proposed (Harter, 1990; James, 1892, Rosenberg, 1979) "the value or importance attributed to a given self-concept domain determines the extent to which perceived competence or incompetence in that domain influences self-esteem, affect, and motivation" (Brewer et al., 1993, p. 238). Therefore,
scholars hypothesized that an individual involved in an activity of low importance for them will not be strongly affected by the results of that activity, whether it is positive or not. In contrast, if an individual such as an athlete is involved in activities of great importance to him/her, he/she will have her feelings of self-worth strongly affected by the outcome. Therefore, scholars believe that athletes' self-esteem can be strongly influenced by the role they carry in their sport, and vice-versa (Brewer et al., 1993). As a result, participation in that sport would become an important part of their identity; it would become their Athletic Identity.

At this time, and before exploring and reviewing the specific areas of study associated with Athletic Identity, let's first look at how, throughout the years, Brewer et al. (1993) have created, developed and enhanced an instrument to measure Athletic Identity; or Athletic Identity Measurement Scale. This scale is the outcome of an area of research on student-athletes where a team of researchers has developed a sustained program of research, with the intent to develop the measure and to understand the correlates of athletic identity.

**Athletic Identity Measurement Scale**

Brewer et al. (1993) first described and conducted research on Athletic Identity from a one-dimensional perspective, which they measured with the help of the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS). The AIMS was designed to measure both the salience and exclusivity of Athletic Identity, in a simple quantitative manner. This instrument was planned and designed because no other measure existed that assessed both variables that they were trying to target, "the strength and the exclusivity of an individual's identification with the athlete role" (Brewer et al., 1993, p. 242). The AIMS
was composed of 10 items scored on a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*, where the higher the score, the higher the individual identifying with the athletic role. Following are the ten items:

1. I consider myself an athlete.
2. I have many goals related to sport.
3. Most of my friends are athletes.
4. Sport is the most important part of my life.
5. I spend more time thinking about sport than anything else.
6. I need to participate in sport to feel good about myself.
7. Other people see me mainly as an athlete.
8. I feel bad about myself when I do poorly in sport.
9. Sport is the only important thing in my life.
10. I would be very depressed if I were injured and could not compete in sport.

(Brewer et al., 1993)

In the early 1990’s, Brewer (1990) and Brewer et al. (1993) designed, redesigned, tested and retested the AIMS (One Factor Model - AIMS₁), in order to obtain a tool with sound psychometrics for measuring the level of Athletic Identity in student-athletes.

Below is a representation of the relation of the AIMS items, and the one factor model:

![One Factor Model - AIMS](image)

(Hale et al., 1999)

Figure 2. One Factor Model of Athletic Identity Measurement Scale.

These empirical studies employed quantitative methodology, to compare AIMS scores with scores on other instruments that shared similar or dissimilar constructs. Equal
samples of men and women, who were either athletes or non-athletes, were used to test the AIMS’ psychometric reliability and validity. This assessment tool rapidly demonstrated its value when scores were statistically significantly related to athletes’ self-reports of level of involvement in sport. This meant that the AIMS had strong construct validity. Brewer et al. (1993) also reported convergent validity between the AIMS, and theoretically and conceptually relevant variables such as competitiveness and importance of sport. They also found evidence of discriminant validity for variables such as general and physical self-esteem. Similar findings were also obtained by other researchers. Hale and Waalkes (1994) reported strong internal consistency \( r = .93 \) and test-retest reliability \( r = .89 \). Martin and colleagues reported adequate construct and discriminant validity (Martin, Mushett & Eklund, 1994; Martin, Eklund, & Adams-Mushett, 1997).

Evolution of the AIMS

Although Brewer et al. (1993) first described and conducted research on Athletic Identity, using the AIMS, as if it represented a one-dimensional scale, in more recent years, some scholars raised questions about the unidimensionality of the AIMS (Hale et al. 1999; Martin et al., 1997). Further factor analytic research suggested that the AIMS may be comprised of three dimensions (Three Factor Model - AIMS3): social identity, exclusivity, and negative affectivity, and a single higher order factor: Athletic Identity (Hale et al. 1999; Martin et al., 1997). Researchers believe that the initial misrepresentation of the AIMS as a unidimensional tool was due to the fact that initial validations of the scale were based on comparison of athletes and non-athletes, rather
than having a sample composed of a progressive array of athletes (Brewer et al., 1993; Hale et al. 1999).

In the last decade, researchers confirmed the multidimensional dimension of the AIMS, introduced the possibility of a 4th factor (Four Factor Model - AIMS4) named Self Identity, re-confirmed the three factor AIMS model, and disconfirmed the four factor model. The confirmations came after many manipulations and subtractions of different number of items (from a 7-item to a 9-item version), and a sample categorized by level of athleticism, rather than athlete versus non-athlete (Brewer & Cornelius, 2001; Hale, 1995; Hale et al., 1999; Martin et al., 1994). While these results seem to point future research to follow a multidimensional lead, Brewer and Cornelius (2001) confirmed and established that the correlation between the total score for the 10-item AIMS and the 7-item AIMS was .96, which maintains the unidimensional scale as a very reliable and long lasting tool to measure the higher order factor of: Athletic Identity. In addition, Brewer and Cornelius (2001) argued the need for further work on the multidimensional scale, in order to achieve stronger and more reliable measurements. In particular, they stated the need to have additional items in the multidimensional scale, due to the fact that two of the factors only have two items each. Consequently, those few changes would allow them to continue developing a tool with sound psychometrics for measuring the level of Athletic Identity in student-athletes.

In conclusion, the major findings in the literature about the AIMS reveal the many transformations of this tool, as well as the ability for all the models of the AIMS to adequately measure both the salience and exclusivity of an individual's Athletic Identity, while maintaining a consistent and adequate internal consistency, test-retest reliability,
and adequate construct and discriminant validity. However, as Hale et al. (1999) remind us, while the AIMS has consistently been able to measure dimensions of student-athletes identities, it has also noticeably varied in its factors and their specific functions. Therefore, more empirical research is needed to further our understanding of this scale, while the current potential use of it seems unlimited.

Summary

Literature on Athletic Identity incorporates concepts from multiple theoretical perspectives including developmental perspectives, socialization, and social role theory. Scholars have more recently started to focus on a more developmental perspective to understand Athletic Identity. These scientists focused on theorists such as Erickson and Chickering, who believe that the identity formation occurring during the college years is normally a period of identity exploration. Those scientists also believe that exploring many new roles and identities, in a flexible manner, is not only normal but necessary for development, and that often student-athletes lack the required flexibility. In a slightly different manner, the socialization perspective looks at the development of identity as a balance that individuals have to attain between their personal and social identity. This balance is often hard to attain, because of the fact that our current society seems to lead young athletes away from their first inclination, which is to play recreational sport. In fact, sports in the North American society seem to have launched themselves more and more in the direction of competitive sport and winning above all mentality.

Early interactionists, such as James, Stryker, and Hoelter based their theoretical foundations on a connection between the role of the individual and the social structure. They recognized the importance of identity salience and commitment to that identity,
which was later acknowledged as an important tool in the study of sport behavior. From there and based on social role theory, Brewer et al. (1993), identified the concept of Athletic Identity, which they defined as "the degree to which the individual identifies with the athlete role" (Brewer et al., 1993, p. 237), and which they based not only on identity salience, but also on one's personal self-concept. This implied that individuals such as athletes who are involved in activities of great importance to them will have their feelings of self-worth strongly affected by the outcome. Therefore, athletes' self-esteem can be strongly influenced by the role they carry in their sport, and vice-versa. Brewer et al. operationalized the construct of Athletic Identity through the development of the AIMS. The AIMS is currently viewed as a tool with sound psychometrics for measuring the level of Athletic Identity in student-athletes.

Athletic Identity of Student-Athletes

The development of the construct of Athletic Identity, further led scientists to write descriptive articles and conduct some empirical research concerning the costs and benefits of high levels of Athletic Identity. Therefore, this next section will investigate and describe first the broad potential benefits and detriments related to a high level of Athletic Identity. Following this general overview, a more focused discussion will be offered concerning the areas researched most in the current literature on Athletic Identity, which are: lack of career maturity, difficulties in retirement and transitions, and psychological problems related to student-athletes with a high level of Athletic Identity. The last area of focus will concentrate on multicultural issues and will cover race, gender, age and disabilities related to student-athletes with a high level of Athletic Identity.
Empirical studies have indicated that student-athletes with a strong Athletic Identity are usually amongst the best in their sport, while also being identified as being the most vulnerable to emotional disturbance (Stankovich, Meeker, & Henderson, 2001). Researchers believe this to be due to the fact that the Athletic Identity is incorporated into an athlete’s self-concept, or the perception that he/she has of self, in terms of personal worth and competence (Balague, 1999; Brewer et al., 1993; Brown, Glastetter-Fender, & Shelton, 2000; Kornspan & Etzel, 2001). Therefore, as Hale et al. (1999) proposed, when a person with strong Athletic Identity experiences an athletic failure, the effect on his/her self-concept may be far more extreme than for those who identify less with that role. In addition, scholars hypothesized that, student-athletes often gravitate, consciously or not, towards a stronger Athletic Identity as they sense its necessity to increase sport performance and attain their goals of playing at the highest level. To these athletes, everything outside their athletic plan that may lead them away from their dream is dismissed (Young & Bursik, 2000). As stated earlier, scholars believe that this process starts in childhood, and may result in the development of attitudes, behaviors, values, and skills common to student-athletes (Parham, 1993), while also impeding the natural process of role exploration and consequently broader identity formation. The process involved in the formation of Athletic Identity is believed by the sport scientist community to carry both positive and negative consequences for the collegiate student-athlete (Miller & Kerr, 2003; Brown & Hartley, 1998; Rotella & Newburg, 1989).

Broad Positive Consequences

Scholars seemed to agree when they discuss and investigate the potential benefits
of a high level of Athletic Identity. They suggested that those benefits included a salient self-identity or sense of self, enhanced athletic performance and commitment, increased exercise participation, increased self-esteem, and increased social interactions (with other student-athletes). While this is believed to be true for both male and female student-athletes, empirical research has found that men generally have a slightly higher level of Athletic Identity than women, and therefore men are believed to experience a higher level of these benefits (Brewer et al., 1993; Brown & Hartley, 1998; Horton & Mack, 2000; Martin et al., 1997; McPherson, 1980). Athletic Identity is also more prominent amongst revenue versus non-revenue athletes, which is believed to be due to the revenue sports' focus on perfection, as well as the ideology of the sport, which lets the athletes believe that they may play professionally after college (Young & Bursik, 2000).

**Broad Negative Consequences**

As for negative consequences, scholars also seemed to agree about the main problems that high Athletic Identity can inflict on student-athletes in college. Empirical research found that the major negative consequence is over-commitment to the athletic role, which in turn is believed to lead to a restriction in development of other aspects of the student-athlete's self. Therefore, scholars believe that the Athletic Identity becomes so salient that the individual starts experiencing conflicts with his/her other roles and activities. They also agree that this can become a problem when the athlete gets to the point of not attending any non-sport related activities, and therefore decreases considerably his/her other roles. A vicious circle can ensue such that the higher the level of Athletic Identity, the less likely that individual is to explore areas outside of sport (Brewer et al., 1993; Kornspan & Etzel, 2001). Scholars believe that this lack of
exploration increases the chances of identity foreclosure, which means that "the individual completely commits to a role without engaging in exploratory behavior" (Marcia, Waterman, Matteson, Archer, & Orlofsky, 1993, p. 25). Scholars suggested that identity foreclosure in turn may lead the athlete with a high, or almost exclusive, Athletic Identity to experience: career immaturity, poor adjustments when retiring or in the eventuality of a career-ending injury, and psychological problems, such as: poorer health, more social isolation, substance abuse, depression and lower self-esteem (Brewer et al., 1993; Hale et al. 1999; Horton & Mack, 2000; Martin et al., 1997; Miller & Kerr, 2003; Sparkes, 1998).

**Lack of Career Maturity Associated with Athletic Identity**

The area of study that has been investigated the most with respect to Athletic Identity is student-athletes' career related concerns, such as their lack of career development and career maturity (Brown et al., 2000; Kornspan & Etzel, 2001). The literature recognizes that the college years and late adolescence are a time period during which individuals' exploration toward career related subjects comes into its final steps, and the career decision making process is started (Nelson, 1983; Young & Bursik, 2000). In college, students question their identity, sense of self, relation with friends and family, as well as in the world. In other words, scholars believe that college aged students move through a phase of exploration and emancipation, where the ultimate goal is to find independence and a potential career aspiration (Kenny, 1990; Nelson, 1983). The athletic literature suggests that student-athletes' experiences are different than other students, due to the fact that their Athletic role, or Athletic Identity is prominent in their life, and can
therefore negatively influence their career maturity level (Parham, 1993; Phillips &
Strohmer, 1982).

Literature recognizes that becoming a champion or star in the field of athletics is
difficult, especially while pursuing an education at the same time. The balance that
student-athletes must juggle with every day between academics and athletics is often
difficult to achieve. Therefore, scholars believe that in order for the athlete to stay or
become highly performant, he/she has to decide to sacrifice, consciously or not, either
athletics or academics by reducing their participation in that field. Therefore, the sacrifice
of academics is usually easily made for student-athletes with a high level of Athletic
Identity (Martinelli, 2000). Unfortunately, these same athletes often have an idealistic
goal of participating in professional sports after graduation (Wilkes, Davis, & Dever,
1989), because only 1 to 2% of college athletes realistically have a chance to achieve this
goal (Lee, 1983). Furthermore, scholars believe that the sacrifices and difficulties that
student-athletes grow up with and go through during their college years have the potential
to considerably disrupt, not only their career maturity, but also their career decision
making process (Stankovich et al., 2001).

Lennings (1994) writes that career maturity is “the competence that individuals
demonstrate in coping with career developmental tasks at various life stages” (p. 243).
Scholars believe that thinking about one’s future, engaging in career planning, and
managing time, are some of the areas that all individuals need to go through to reach a
higher level of competency in vocational tasks. Most of the empirically based research,
focused on Athletic Identity and career maturity, has found that student-athletes have
lower levels of career maturity than students (Blann, 1985; Cornelius, 1995; Kennedy &
Research has also documented the fact that this lack of career maturity, for individuals who hold a strong and almost exclusive Athletic Identity and identity foreclosure, can lead to their delay in reaching a career decision (Engstrom & Sedlacek, 1991; Etzel, Pinkney, & Hinkel, 1995; Kornspan & Etzel, 2001; Young & Bursik, 2000).

This area of research related to Athletic Identity is strongly emphasized in the literature (Murphy, Petitpas, & Brewer, 1996), and is strongly empirically based on quantitative research. Those empirical studies are based on samples of males and females, with higher to lower levels of Athletic Identity, as well as non-athletes. As stated earlier, male student-athletes, who were found to generally possess a higher level of Athletic Identity, are likely to show a stronger lack of career maturity than their female counterparts. This is believed by researchers to be due to the same ideology that distinguishes revenue from non-revenue sports. More specifically, researchers suggested that society offers female student-athletes very little chance to pursue a career in sport, therefore, with that knowledge in mind, female student-athletes tend not pursue an athletic career as often as male student-athletes. Therefore, researchers believe that female student-athletes tend to boast a slightly lower level of Athletic Identity, as well as a higher level of career maturity (Lantz & Schroeder, 1999; Young & Bursik, 2000) than male student-athletes.

The literature also consistently suggests that the stronger the Athletic Identity is, the less probable it would be for the student-athlete to explore areas outside of sport (Brewer et al., 1993; Kornspan & Etzel, 2001). This exclusive focus on sport and lack of exploration outside of it is believed to increase the likelihood of identity foreclosure.
Research shows that student-athletes who are foreclosed, identify almost exclusively with the athletic role, and have been found to have a strong probability of demonstrating low career maturity and being affected by an avoidance of career decision making (Brewer et al., 1993; Brown et al., 2000; Grant & Darley, 1993; Hale et al., 1999; Martens & Cox, 2000; Martens & Lee, 1998; Murphy et al., 1996). Scholars suggest that this foreclosure, or lack of exploration in career choices, may be influenced by athletes themselves, as well as family, coaches, schools, and media who push those athletes to strive for perfection. Those actions, while giving student-athletes stronger chances to succeed in their sport, are also believed to hinder their path when their athletic career ends, and their future starts. Scholars agree that student-athletes with an almost exclusive Athletic Identity are much more inclined to avoid career decision making processes, and function less successfully after they terminate their sport.

Empirical research has found this to be especially true for male student-athletes and student-athletes involved in revenue sports (Etzel et al., 1995; Kornspan & Etzel, 2001; Martens & Cox, 2000; Martinelli, 2000; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990; Nelson, 1983; Wittmer, Bostic, Don Phillips, & Waters, 1981).

Transition Difficulties Associated with Athletic Identity

The literature exploring and discussing student-athletes’ difficulties in transitions and retirement from sport is closely related to the career maturity and identity foreclosure studies. Based on the same principle as the career decision making process research, difficulties about having to end their athletic career are associated with student-athletes’ lack of experience exploring other options and choices, due to their sole and exclusive focus on being at the top of their athletic performance. Therefore, the literature suggests
that student-athletes with the highest level of Athletic Identity are the ones more prone to having emotional difficulties when it is time for them to consider prematurely or not, and accidentally or not, to end their athletic career (Bailie, 1993; Grove, Lavallee, & Gordon, 1997; Stankovich et al.; Webb, Nasco, Riley, & Headrick, 1998).

Scholars hypothesized that a strong factor related to occurrence of emotional difficulties after retirement is not only the level of Athletic Identity, but also the cause of the retirement. Therefore descriptive and empirical studies have focused on two general categories – retirement that is freely chosen, and retirement forced by circumstances, such as deselection or injury (Ogilvie & Taylor, 1993). This concept is closely related to psychological control or “the extent to which one believes he/she has influence over his/her own life outcomes” (Webb et al., 1998, p. 340), and is understood and studied as individuals’ skills in dealing with events, which occur in their life, such as retirement. Scholars believe that these skills are typically developed and formed throughout the individual's life experiences and exploration, which, they believe is lacking in student-athletes with high levels of Athletic Identity (Bailie, 1993; Grove et al., 1997; Stankovich et al.; Webb et al., 1998).

Studies reported expected results, in that retirement from injury, especially unexpected injury is the hardest to deal with, particularly with athletes who have high levels of Athletic Identity. Those types of transitions are believed to be extremely hard on student-athletes who had such an exclusive Athletic Identity that they barely developed any options to pursue after their participation in their sport. Empirical findings have found this to be especially true amongst revenue sports and for men, which is believed to be due to the fact that society, and therefore those student-athletes, have had a stronger
conviction in the possibility that, their athletic talent could become their career, and that they could be in that 1-2% of athletes who become professionals. In general, empirical research found that non-revenue sports and women student-athletes are less inclined to have a hard retirement and transition, which is believed because they never really had the belief that becoming a professional in their sport was an option for them (Grove et al., 1997; Kennedy & Dimick, 1987; Lanning & Toye, 1993; Martinelli, 2000; Smallman & Sowa, 1996; Webb et al., 1998).

**Psychological Problems Associated with Athletic Identity**

While little empirical research specifically focused on psychological problems in relation with Athletic Identity, again, the literature exploring and discussing this topic was closely related to studies on retirement, transitions and career maturity. Brewer’s (1993) first study, relating to Athletic Identity and psychological problems, was focused on depression and the effects of a career-ending injury. The empirical results were expected and showed that student-athletes with high and exclusive levels of Athletic Identity are more highly prone to experiencing debilitating symptoms of depression following a negative life event. More specifically, research showed that while this was true, the depression was even more accentuated when the life event was related to the individual’s bringing to a halt sport related activities, rather than other life activities (Brewer, 1993; Green & Weinberg, 2001).

As stated earlier, the literature emphasizes that student-athletes with a high, or almost exclusive, Athletic Identity, not only experience career immaturity, poor adjustments when retiring, or in the eventuality of a career-ending injury, but, scholars suggested they may also be predisposed to poorer health, more social isolation, potential
substance abuse, depression and lower self-esteem (Brewer et al., 1993; Hale et al. 1999; Horton & Mack, 2000; Martin et al., 1997; Miller & Kerr, 2003; Sparkes, 1998). Those psychological problems are explained by Brewer (1993) as “providing convergent evidence in support of the hypothesis that events that disrupt the pursuit of self-defining activities can elicit depressed mood” (p. 360). Therefore, scholars hypothesized that student-athletes who experience almost exclusive Athletic Identity are so focused on their sport that not much else counts. As previously stated and empirically supported, this is more prominent in men than women student-athletes and in revenue than non-revenue sports (Brewer, 1993; Brewer et al., 1993; Hale et al., 1999, Horton & Mack, 2000).

**Multicultural Issues Associated with Athletic Identity**

Little empirical research specifically focused on multicultural issues, including race, gender, age, and disability, can be found in the sport psychology literature (Cogan & Petrie, 2002). This is even truer when discussing Athletic Identity in association with multicultural issues. Only a handful of articles were found relating to race, gender, and disabilities and how those are correlated with Athletic Identity; this field of study is still in its infancy, and needs much more development in order to become helpful to student-athletes across American colleges (Jackson, Keiper, Brown, Brown & Manuel, 2002; Kontos & Breland-Noble, 2002).

**Race**

Only one study focusing on race was identified. This research empirically examined the relationship between Athletic Identity and racial attitudes (Jackson et al., 2002). Jackson et al.’s (2002) study was conducted with surveys given to incoming freshman athletes by the National Collegiate Athletic Association in 1996, and was based
on a quantitative methodology. An almost equal sample of men (54.8%) and women (45.2%) were identified and used, for a total sample of about 500 student-athletes. The largest groups of respondents were White/Caucasian (75.3%), or Black/African Americans (18.3%). A wide range of sports was represented, and Athletic Identity was categorized by level of athleticism, rather than athlete versus non-athlete. Jackson et al. (2002) hypothesized that White and African American student-athlete’s sense of racial identity would be strongly diminished due to their focus on their Athletic Identity.

Due to past research that acknowledged the fact that winning on a sport team is the most important thing, the authors hypothesized that racial issues would be diminished in the context of high and more exclusive Athletic Identity, and therefore issues of race and racial discrimination would also decrease. If this would prove to be true, then Athletic Identity may have one more consequence. Jackson et al. (2002) found that consistent with their hypothesis, African American male student-athletes with a high Athletic Identity felt like they belonged more to their groups as athletes than to their racial group. In contrast, Caucasian male student-athletes with a high level of Athletic Identity, were more likely to feel like they belonged more to their racial group rather than to their athletic group. In the case of women in the same situation, no significant relationship was found between their athletic and racial identities (Jackson et al., 2002).

Gender

Empirical research on gender and Athletic Identity is also sparse. Most of the research based on gender was developed looking at gender role when participating in sport, and not specifically at Athletic Identity and gender. The main empirical results show that Athletic Identity is more closely related to masculinity than femininity (Lantz
and therefore with men more than with women. Also, men tend to have a higher and more exclusive Athletic Identity than women, while women demonstrated a higher level of career maturity than men. Researchers believed that these findings can either be explained by the fact that women are more adapted to being foreclosed, or more probably, that women realize they have less professional opportunities in their sport of choice, and therefore are more conscious about not basing their identity solely on athletics (Lantz & Schroeder, 1999; Young & Bursik, 2000).

Age

Empirical research on age and Athletic Identity is also rare. While one study looked at age as a somewhat important component, it started by empirically examining the effect of Athletic Identity on life priorities and athletic experience (Horton & Mack, 2000). This study was conducted with 236 marathon runners (males N= 176; females N = 60), who ranged in age from 19 to 72 years, with a mean age of 41 years, and who had been running for an average of 11.2 years. Therefore, the sample was not focused on collegiate athletics, and Athletic Identity was again categorized by level of athleticism, rather than athlete versus non-athlete. Horton and Mack found very dissimilar results than the ones shared by all other studies on Athletic Identity. They found “no evidence that runners with strong Athletic Identity were neglecting other aspects of their life in order to fulfill the needs of the athlete role” (Horton & Mack, 2000, p. 113). On the contrary, they found those individuals to be exposed to a greater amount of positive consequences, such as “enhanced body image, increased self-confidence, and decreased anxiety” (Horton & Mack, 2000, p. 113).
When comparing the magnitude of Athletic Identity between collegiate studies and their study, Horton and Mack (2000) found no difference in the level of salience of Athletic Identity. Therefore, they hypothesized that age was the variable most likely to account for those changes. Their theory, at this time, is that the self-concepts of the college age teenager and the mature adult, are different in nature. They believe that the student-athlete confers more importance and complexity to their athletic self-concept, while the adult’s athletic self-concept has developed and attained an equal dimension with other life roles. This is strongly related to a developmental perspective, where the identity and self-concept in college student-athletes has not yet reached its full maturity level and balance in roles. Specific research is needed to discover and learn more about this new developmental perspective.

Disabilities

Two empirical studies are specifically focused on athletes with disabilities (Martin et al., 1994; 1997). The 1994 study was conducted with a sample of 57 international permanently disabled swimmers, in their adolescent years, and reconfirmed a few years later by Martin et al. (1997), who used a similar sample of swimmers with permanent disabilities, while increasing the sample (N = 78) in order to provide increased generalizability (Hale et al., 1999; Martin et al., 1994; Martin et al., 1997). Both studies were quantitative in nature and were conducted with an approximately equal number of males and females athletes. However, the reader must keep in mind that in both studies, the samples were made up only of swimmers; therefore no other sport was represented.

Findings from these studies indicated that athletes (not student-athletes in those two cases) with disability reported experiencing moderate to high levels of Athletic
Identity (Martin, Adams-Mushett, & Smith, 1995). This led the authors to conclude, that coaches, parents, and support staff of athletes with disabilities should be conscious of the fact that being an athlete is important to these men and women, and therefore to not diminish their will to succeed and battle in competition. In addition, findings from these studies suggested a previously unidentified potentially important fourth component of Athletic Identity: Self Identity. Further research is needed in order to discover if this fourth factor associated with the AIMS is related to the measurement of Athletic Identity, athletes with permanent disabilities, swimmers with permanent disabilities or people who participate in more ‘individual’ sports (Martin et al., 1997).

Summary

Empirical studies have indicated that student-athletes with a strong Athletic Identity are usually amongst the best in their sport, while also being the most vulnerable to emotional disturbances (Stankovich, et al., 2001). Researchers believe this to be due to the fact that the Athletic Identity is incorporated into an athlete’s self-concept, or the perception that he/she has of self, in terms of personal worth and competence (Balague, 1999; Brewer et al., 1993; Brown et al., 2000; Kornspan & Etzel, 2001). In addition, scholars hypothesized that, student-athletes often gravitate, consciously or not, towards a stronger Athletic Identity as they sense its necessity to increase sport performance and attain their goals of playing at the highest level. To these athletes, everything outside their athletic plan that may lead them away from their dream is dismissed (Young & Bursik, 2000).

Scholars seemed to agree that the potential benefits of a high level of Athletic Identity included: a salient self-identity or sense of self, enhanced athletic performance
and commitment, increased exercise participation, increased self-esteem, and increased social interactions (with other student-athletes). Scholars also seemed to agree that the major negative consequences are: over-commitment to the athletic role, which in turn is believed to lead to a restriction in development of other aspects of the student-athlete’s self. A vicious circle can ensue, such that the higher the level of Athletic Identity, the less likely that individual is to explore areas outside of sport (Brewer et al., 1993; Kornspan & Etzel, 2001). Scholars believe that this lack of exploration increases the chances of identity foreclosure, which means that “the individual completely commits to a role without engaging in exploratory behavior” (Marcia, et al., 1993, p. 25). Scholars suggested that identity foreclosure in turn may lead the athlete with a high, or almost exclusive, Athletic Identity to experience: career immaturity, poor adjustments when retiring or in the eventuality of a career-ending injury, and psychological problems, such as: poorer health, more social isolation, substance abuse, depression and lower self-esteem (Brewer et al., 1993; Hale et al. 1999; Horton & Mack, 2000; Martin et al., 1997; Miller & Kerr, 2003; Sparkes, 1998).

While those results are true for both male and female student-athletes, and revenue versus non-revenue student-athletes, empirical research has found that men and revenue sport athletes generally have a slightly higher level of Athletic Identity than women and non-revenue sport athletes. This is believed by researchers to be due to the same ideology that distinguishes revenue from non-revenue sports, which they explained with the lack of future career potential for non-revenue sports. Researchers suggested that society offers female student-athletes very little chance to pursue a career in sport, therefore, with that knowledge in mind, female student-athletes tend to not pursue an
athletic career as often as male student-athletes. Therefore, researchers believe that
female student-athletes tend to boast a slightly lower level of Athletic Identity, as well as
a higher level of career maturity (Lantz & Schroeder, 1999; Young & Bursik, 2000) than
male student-athletes. Finally, research related to race, gender, and disabilities and how
those are correlated with Athletic Identity is extremely sparse, and needs much more
development in order to become helpful to student-athletes across American colleges
(Jackson et al., 2002; Kontos & Breland-Noble, 2002).

Chapter Summary

Scholars have looked at specific characteristics and challenges faced by student-
athletes, scientists and theorists have proposed integrative summaries regarding the
identity development of student-athletes, and the specific concept of Athletic Identity has
been empirically developed and studied to better identify and understand issues relating
to student-athletes. The major literature about collegiate student-athletes describe them as
having a different view on life; or distinct view of the world, as well as different ways to
deal with issues and problems they may face, than other college students may have.
These differences in perceiving and experiencing the world are believed to be based on
the high levels of commitment that many student-athletes bestow to their sport, as well as
the way they seem to strongly identify with their athletic role or identity (Brewer et al.,
1993; Eldridge, 1983).

While those basic differences are mostly seen between student-athletes and other
students, they are also found across division, sport, gender, race, and level of athletic
skills. Student-athletes are often described as perceiving themselves as being stronger,
fastrer, and better than their college peers. Scholars believe that this view begins to
develop early in their athletic career, and that by the time student-athletes start college, they can often be seen as experiencing challenges in balancing academia and athletics, as well as having limited peer relationships, lack of career and social development, and a restricted self-concept or basis for self-worth (Chartrand & Lent, 1987).

Literature on the identity development of student-athletes incorporates concepts from multiple theoretical perspectives including developmental perspectives, socialization, and social role theory. Descriptive research has recently started to focus on developmentalists such as Erickson (1980) and Chickering (Chickering & Reisser, 1993), who believe that the identity formation occurring during the college years is normally a period of identity exploration. Those theorists believe that exploring many new roles and identities, in a flexible manner, is not only normal but necessary for development, and that often student-athletes lack that required flexibility.

In a slightly different manner, the socialization perspective looks at the development of identity as a balance that individuals have to attain between their personal and social identity. However, scholars believe that for student-athletes this balance is often hard to attain, because of the fact that our current society seems to lead young athletes away from recreational sport, and toward competitive sport; or winning above all mentality. Early interactionists, such as James (1950), Stryker (1968, 1980, 1982) and Hoelter (1983) based their theoretical foundations on a connection between the role of the individual and the social structure. They recognized the importance of identity salience and commitment to that identity, which was later acknowledged as an important tool in the study of sport behavior.
Applying social role theory, Brewer et al. (1993), extended understanding of student-athletes through the concept of Athletic Identity. Athletic Identity is defined as "the degree to which the individual identifies with the athlete role" (Brewer et al., 1993, p. 237), and is based not only on identity salience, but also on one’s personal self-concept. This implies that individuals such as athletes who are involved in activities of great importance to them will have their feelings of self-worth strongly affected by the outcome. Therefore, scholars believe that athletes’ self-esteem can be strongly influenced by the role they carry in their sport, and vice-versa. Brewer et al. (1993) operationalized the construct of Athletic Identity through development of the AIMS, which is currently viewed as a tool with sound psychometrics for measuring the salience and exclusivity of Athletic Identity in student-athletes.

Empirical studies have indicated that student-athletes with a strong Athletic Identity are usually amongst the best in their sport, while also being the most vulnerable to emotional disturbances (Stankovich, et al., 2001). Researchers believe that this is due to the fact that the Athletic Identity is incorporated into an athlete’s self-concept, or the perception that he/she has of self, in terms of personal worth and competence (Balague, 1999; Brewer et al., 1993; Brown et al., 2000; Kornspan & Etzel, 2001). In addition, scholars hypothesized that, student-athletes often gravitate, consciously or not, towards a stronger Athletic Identity as they sense its necessity to increase sport performance and attain their goals of playing at the highest level. To these athletes, everything outside their athletic plan that may lead them away from their dream is dismissed (Young & Bursik, 2000).
Scholars seemed to agree that the potential benefits of a high level of Athletic Identity included: a salient self-identity or sense of self, enhanced athletic performance and commitment, increased exercise participation, increased self-esteem, and increased social interactions (with other student-athletes). However, scholars also seemed to agree that the major negative consequences are: over-commitment to the athletic role, which in turn leads to a restriction in development of other aspects of the student-athlete’s self. A vicious circle can ensue, such that the higher the level of Athletic Identity, the less likely that individual is to explore areas outside of sport (Brewer et al., 1993; Kornspan & Etzel, 2001). Scholars believe that this lack of exploration increases the chances of identity foreclosure, which means that “the individual completely commits to a role without engaging in exploratory behavior” (Marcia, et al., 1993, p. 25). Scholars suggested that identity foreclosure in turn leads the athlete with a high, or almost exclusive Athletic Identity, to experience: career immaturity, poor adjustments when retiring or in the eventuality of a career-ending injury, and psychological problems, such as: poorer health, more social isolation, substance abuse, depression and lower self-esteem (Brewer et al., 1993; Hale et al. 1999; Horton & Mack, 2000; Martin et al., 1997; Miller & Kerr, 2003; Sparkesk, 1998).

While those results hold for both male and female student-athletes, and revenue versus non-revenue sports, empirical research has found that male student-athletes and student-athletes in revenue sports generally have a slightly higher level of Athletic Identity than female student-athletes and student-athletes in non-revenue sports. These two differences have been explained by the ideology of sport, which essentially leads male student-athletes and revenue sports to believe that they may one day become
professional athletes, in contradiction with female student-athletes and non-revenue sports. Researchers believed that perhaps as a result of their lower Athletic Identity, female student-athletes tended to boast a higher level of career decision making skills, and better prospects following retirement from sport (Brewer et al., 1993; Brown & Hartley, 1998; Horton & Mack, 2000; Martin et al., 1997; McPherson, 1980). At last, very little empirical research specifically focused on multicultural issues, including race, gender, age, and disability and Athletic Identity (Cogan & Petrie, 2002).

Limitations of Current Literature

Research on Athletic Identity is in its infancy, therefore, few empirical studies have been conducted in order to better understand student-athletes around campuses, and most of those conducted focused on only one or two aspects such as: the career decision making process and the retirement process. This lack of studies is not the only limitation found in the research on Athletic Identity. Another important limitation is that the current empirical research focuses solely on one definition of Athletic Identity, which is based on the salience and exclusivity of the Athletic role for student-athletes. This means that, at this time, the descriptive and empirical literature on Athletic Identity is solely concerned with variation in the level and strength of Athletic Identity, rather than on the discovery of the content of that identity for student-athletes.

Need for Future Study

The existing focus, on the salience and exclusivity of student-athletes' Athletic Identity, rather than its content, leads us to the important implication of trying to start to understand Athletic Identity, in a more descriptive way by exploring its essence. Hence
there is a need to conduct further research to identify and describe the attitudes, behaviors, values, and skills that student-athletes may have in common. This can be done by developing research based on some tenets of the multicultural literature, and therefore based on the discovery and understanding of Student Athlete Worldview, rather than relying solely on the previously described quantifiable facets of sociological and developmental theories.

In addition, the current literature review did not identify any qualitative research pertaining to Athletic Identity. This absence contributes to a serious lack of information about any aspect of Athletic Identity other than the level of such identification. There is a need to gather information about how student-athletes perceive and experience themselves and the world through their athletic experiences; or Student Athlete Worldview. This information, which will illustrate the essence of college student-athletes’ Athletic Identity, could then be reported in a qualitative manner, which is an area that is lacking in empirical studies about Athletic Identity.

Therefore, studies from a different perspective, such as this one, would allow researchers to investigate, explore and describe the essence of Athletic Identity, rather than focusing only on its level of salience. These descriptions would, in turn, allow college counselors to be more effective in counseling student-athletes, as well as enable researchers to conduct further studies related to student-athletes’ Athletic Identity, Worldview and counseling.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to learn about student-athletes’ view of the world, to discover and describe the way they perceive and experience
themselves and the world through their athletic experiences. In this study, integration of these perceptions and experiences will be defined as Student Athlete Worldview, and will encompass the description of the essence of student-athletes’ Athletic Identity, as expressed in their own words. The present study explores and describes Student Athlete Worldview, from collegiate student-athletes’ perspective. The specific focus of this investigation is: How do student-athletes perceive and experience themselves and the world as a result of their athletic experiences; or what is Student Athlete Worldview?
CHAPTER II

METHODS

Significance of the Study

As stated earlier, the significance of this study lies in its focus on the qualitative description of Student Athlete Worldview (SAWV), rather than quantitatively measuring the level of Athletic Identity in comparison to their student role. In other words, this phenomenological study is significant due to the fact that it would be one of the first to investigate, explore and describe the essence of Athletic Identity, rather than focusing only on its level of salience. These descriptions will, in turn, allow college counselors to be more effective in counseling student-athletes. This research will also enable researchers to conduct further studies related to student-athletes’ Athletic Identity, Worldview and counseling.

Research Question

This study intends to learn about student-athletes’ view of the world; to explore and describe the way they perceive and experience themselves and the world through their athletic experiences. Therefore, this study intends to discover more about Student Athlete Worldview. The specific research question guiding this study is: How do student-athletes perceive and experience themselves and the world as a result of their athletic experiences; or what is Student Athlete Worldview?
Qualitative Research and Phenomenology

This study is qualitative in nature and uses a phenomenological inquiry method, due to the nature of the research question. This inquiry investigates, explores and describes the core ideas and important elements, which best illustrate the essence of college athletes’ Athletic Identity. As I explored the past and current literature on Athletic Identity, student-athletes, and athletes in general, I found extensive research based on quantitative methods. The literature most closely related to the present study focused in areas describing the level of Athletic Identity, and comparing that level to a variety of other variables including career-decision making, identity foreclosure, dropping out of athletics, and depression. The focus of the present study is on the nature and content; or lived experiences of student-athletes, rather than the salience of their Athletic Identity; thus the use of a qualitative method is more appropriate (Creswell, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

A phenomenological inquiry has more specifically allowed me to look at the phenomenon being studied, as well as the core aspects or “the structural essences of this experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 35). Phenomenology is rooted in the meaning and actual descriptions of what the participants’ lived experience are, rather than simply acknowledging the occurrence of the event (Creswell, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Moustakas, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1989). This is definitely at the core of what my research question is trying to ask, discover, explore and describe. Phenomenology is also at the root of my beliefs, which can be summarized as: student-athletes are more than the sum of their parts. This research in part grows out of my experiences as a former student-athlete, a counseling psychologist and a person.
Role of the Researcher - Background and Biases

Polkinghorne (1989) and Moustakas (1994) both believe that a phenomenological researcher needs to engage in self-reflection during a qualitative project. This is due to the fact that as the researcher, I am believed to be closely tied to the qualitative process. I am the instrument who came up with: the topic to explore, the questions to ask, the data collection procedures, as well as the data analysis. All this means that I have a very prominent and important part in this study, which will probably influence its results in one way or another (Morrow & Smith, 2000). One way of reducing the impact of those biases is to discuss my own background and explicitly acknowledge how my viewpoint is incorporated in the study rather than denying my own perspective (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Heppner et al., 1999). A brief overview of my background in the topic being researched follows.

I started swimming, in a club in Switzerland, when I was seven years old, and stopped ten years ago, when I was 27 years old, in a university in the United States. This means that I not only swam for 20 years, I also thought like a swimmer, behaved like a swimmer, and "felt" like a swimmer for all that time. This means that my mind and body were often focused on being the fastest, the strongest and the best. Most of everything I ate, drank, did and breathed was done in order to be as efficient as possible in the short and long term in my athletic career. Therefore, I believe that being an athlete, as well as a student-athlete made me experience the world around me differently than my school peers. This felt especially true in Switzerland, as very few of my friends and peers participated in sports, which are not incorporated into high school and colleges, as is the norm in the United States, but rather competitive clubs to join.
Over the 20 years of my athletic career, during the strenuous and rewarding practices and meets, I was able to experience many feelings, thoughts, attitudes, and beliefs, which allowed me to grow not only as an athlete, but also as a person, a student, and a psychologist. I believe that swimming has given me discipline, perseverance, determination, strength, a high level of commitment, and a strong work ethic, to accomplish anything I put my mind to. My participation in the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta is a good example of that. I think this participation was possible only through very hard work, good organization, excellent time management and strong work, school, and practice ethics. I have also learned, through swimming, how to balance a heavy workload and deal with stress related to school and sports, while achieving sometimes high academic and athletic success.

At the beginning of this project, as I reflected and looked back, I felt that swimming gave me more than it took, while it sometimes seemed the opposite when I was an athlete. As a swimmer in Switzerland, I often felt that I was missing out on “things”, such as spending time with classmates, hanging out after school, week-end activities with friends from school. I also felt that I had to be extremely careful to not do some activities in order not to break anything, eat well, and rest enough to perform well. Finally, I realized that throughout all those years, I truly did not know what not being tired felt like. However, I also remember that I loved it. I loved swimming and the feeling of being in the water and gliding through it, as well as the efforts and competition (against myself and others) I dispensed throughout the years. I also loved the travels that were an enormous part of being an athlete, and of course the camaraderie that I had with many of my fellow swimmers.
Now, ten years after having retired, I just know! I know that swimming was great for me, I know that it brought me many more positives than negatives, I know that it made me confident then and now, I just know. I feel that sport, and particularly swimming, not only allowed me to become who I am today, but helped me and led me to thrive and blossom into who I am today. I'm not "extremely" competitive (and never was I think), but I love a challenge. I like to improve, and find it normal to be told that I can get better at something, without getting offended. I know that life is what it is: good and bad (not perfect), and that I have the skills to lead me through all those good and tough times. I know how to work hard and what it takes to achieve, but I also know when to rest and do nothing (which happens a lot) and that it is ok to do so. Today, I feel like "I just know", because of my twenty years of athletic career, I know who I am, I know how good and bad I am ... I just know.

As I came across all the negative literature, when I was looking into writing a paper during my first class/research project in my doctoral program, I did not understand how so many negative aspects were described and portrayed as being part of student-athletes' lives. At that time, I wondered if those negative aspects were true because of the nature of sports in America (college vs. club), or because the American system of all or nothing emphasizes being number one as the only option, or finally because the possibility of pursuing professional sport in the United States is much more present in student-athletes' minds than in Europe. All those differences, as well as similarities increased my interest and curiosity about student-athletes, which lead me to design and complete' this project.
In conclusion, I believe that there are many aspects that I assimilated through my experience of being a student-athlete, but I often wondered: "are those experiences representative of all student-athletes, or did my parents teach them to me, or did I learn them as part of my academic upbringing?" As I started this study, I was not sure, and this is why I wanted to conduct this study: to find out if student-athletes have common characteristics and aspects of self or identity, and if so, then what the content and description of that identity would be. If student-athletes have common attitudes, behaviors, values, skills, etc. and therefore do possess a common Student Athlete Worldview, then I would like to be able to determine what that Worldview is.

Consequently, one of my biases is the fact that I strongly believe student-athletes do have somewhat of a different and common Worldview, which is therefore influencing some aspects of this research, such as simply pursuing this topic.

Throughout this study, I continuously tried to stay aware of myself as a subjective researcher, in order not to lead the research and the interviews of the student-athletes to go in a positive or negative direction, in either data collection or analysis. I also continuously encouraged myself to self-reflect, as well as monitor my potential biases and values, with the help of my doctoral chair. In addition, an important thing I remembered throughout this inquiry was to not manipulate what the participants told me in their interviews and try to transform it to fit my experiences and expectations. I continuously reminded myself that we all have different experiences and different Worldviews. This meant that I stayed open to learning new things from the interviews and analyses I conducted.
Another aspect for me to be careful about during the data analysis was to not solely focus on the negative side of the student-athletes’ Worldview, as it is so often being portrayed in the literature, and which I had to use and incorporate in this study. I needed to remember that I wanted to gather information on both their negative and positive perceptions and experiences of their relationship to the world and themselves, as student-athletes. The last difficulty that I was aware of, throughout this study was to be careful to not generalize or transfer my findings to all student-athletes, but only to the ones I interviewed. Studies have shown many differences between student-athletes of different races, genders, and cultures, and between different sports such as revenue vs. non-revenue sport and team vs. individual sports. Therefore, as Polkinghorne (1989) believes, I needed to keep an open mind and an open ear, and been willing to change the course and directions of this project if necessary, which did not arise.

Procedures

Participant Selection Procedures

It is extremely important to select participants who have “experienced the phenomenon” (Creswell, 1998, p. 111; Moustakas, 1994, p. 107). They should be information rich participants, and must be able to understand, as well as describe the phenomenon under study (Polkinghorne, 1989), and of course be willing to be a part of the project (Moustakas, 1994). In addition to these criteria, it is important to include a diverse sample, such as, gender, race, culture, religion, and geographical regions, in the sample, whenever possible in order to see the breadth of the phenomenon studied, and
potentially increase the transferability of findings. This in turn will allow the study to provide a better understanding of a wider breadth of people.

Recruitment of Participants

Participants for this study were selected from non-revenue and non-tier-one sports, in interest of easier access of participants. They were recruited from a Division I college or university, in concurrence with research that shows that the level of Athletic Identity increases for athletes who deliver more hours of sport participation and receive more attention, which in turn is more pronounced and defined at that Division level (Brown et al., 2000; Good, Brewer, Petitpas, Van Raalte, & Mahar, 1993). In order to obtain information rich participants, the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) was used as a selection criteria. Brewer et al. (1993) found the AIMS to be a valid and useful tool in measuring the “strength and the exclusivity” (p. 242) of Athletic Identity. Hence, it can be an important tool in obtaining information rich student-athletes for potential studies, especially qualitative studies. The use of the AIMS allows researchers to obtain, in a quick and concise manner, a reliable and valid pool of individuals, in this case student-athletes, who exhibit medium to high levels of Athletic Identity. In this study, the participants exhibiting medium to high levels of Athletic Identity, in response to the AIMS, were chosen in order to allow me to explore and describe a deeper and more pronounced essence of the student-athletes’ Athletic Identity. In addition, in order to obtain information rich participants, the participants having begun active participation in sport prior to age 12 were chosen.

Participants were recruited through two Division I institutions where I had a past relationship with some members of the athletic department, which, in turn allowed me to
enter the field and facilitate gaining access to student-athletes (Creswell, 1998). Two institutions were used to recruit participants, due to the fact that I was able to recruit only one participant from the first institution. The remaining eight participants were recruited from the second Division I institution. For both institutions, I first sought permission from the Athletic Director (AD) to approach coaches, and then sought permission from the coaches to approach their athletes. Therefore, I emailed and telephoned the AD to introduce myself and my research project (Appendix A), and provide him with a written study announcement (Appendix B) to describe to him the details and steps that his coaches and athletes would have to undertake. I also asked him to allow me to talk to the coaches of each non-revenue and non-tier-one sports’ athletic team (Appendix A), and describe my research to them with the help of the written study announcement (Appendix C). Finally, after meeting with the AD and the coaches and with their permission, I was able to discuss my research with the student-athletes and recruit them personally to be part of my project/dissertation that will allow future researchers and college counselors to better understand student-athletes as individuals, and as a group.

After speaking to the AD, I recruited the participants for this project in two different ways. I recruited the majority of student-athletes, by introducing myself and talking to the athletes as a team about my research project (Appendix D), without their coach present, in order to inform them about the study’s goals and procedures. Potential participants were informed that the first phase (information) involved reading and completing the background information (Appendix E) and the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) (Appendix F), as well as reading the recruitment letter (Appendix G), which explained the steps of the study in detail. Those forms helped the
potential participants to become more informed about the research topic under exploration, as well as helped me in deciding if potential participants would be selected for the second phase of the study (Bullard, 2004; Moustakas, 1994). Potential participants were then informed that the second phase (reflection) involved five activities: an initial interview, journaling, review of initial research findings, a follow-up interview, and review of final results. Potential participants were also informed of the anticipated time commitment and content focus of each aspect of phase two: two in-person interviews, one to two months apart; journaling twice a week for two weeks for a total of four journal entries; review of initial research findings/summary of the themes between the two interviews, and review of final results following the second interview. Finally, I asked them to sign the recruitment letter (Appendix G), if they were interested in participating in the study, and to put all those forms in the drop box. Athletes not interested in participating were instructed to return a blank copy of the forms in the drop box. A minority of the participants were recruited in a slightly different fashion. More specifically, at one institution, my initial contact with the athletes was via email. I was able to obtain all the potential names of athletes, who were in school for the summer, that the AD was willing to share with me, and invite them by email, using the athlete’s written study announcement (Appendix H), to come to a few pre-determined group meetings, without their coach present, in which I followed the same steps as above.

At the end of the meeting, and after the student-athletes dropped the forms in the drop box, I reminded them that the potential participants who completed the initial phase of the research and were selected for phase two would be contacted by phone or email, depending on their stated preference, to schedule their initial interview (Appendix I).
Those not selected for phase two would be thanked by phone or email for their response and their interest in this project (Appendix J). Finally, I reminded all the student-athletes, that my contact information was included in their recruitment letter (Appendix G), should they have any questions following the meeting. At the end of this initial meeting with the student-athletes, I discussed confidentiality, as well as the benefits and possible drawbacks of participating in this study (Bullard, 2004; Moustakas, 1994), and thanked them for their consideration of the project.

Selection of Participants

Phenomenologists believe that a deep sense of understanding and experiencing of the phenomenon, as well as a wide array of participants, allows a phenomenological study to take form by itself, and therefore allows the essence of the phenomena to emerge from the data (Polkinghorne, 1989). The richness of those two aspects of the qualitative study enable a researcher to establish transferability with only a few, well selected participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My goal in this study was to invite up to 10 participants for phase two, in order to end up with approximately six to eight participants, who had “experienced the phenomenon” (Creswell, 1998, p. 111; Moustakas, 1994, p. 107), were capable of describing the phenomenon (Polkinghorne, 1989), and were willing to participate throughout the whole length of the project (Moustakas, 1994).

During phase one (information), and after having approached all teams whose AD, and later coaches, granted permission to do so, nine teams and 47 student-athletes were approached in the first institution. One student-athlete, from that institution, answered back and elected to participate in the study by coming to a pre-determined group meeting, and meeting the selection criteria. The selection criteria for participation
in phase two (reflection) were: a) the athlete is competing in one sport in college, in a non-revenue or non-tier-one sport and b) the athlete began active participation in sport prior to age 12. These selection criteria were intended to assure that the participants had a strong enough Athletic Identity to talk about how their athletic experiences are reflected in their Student Athlete Worldview.

Responses to the AIMS were also used to increase the likelihood of selecting information rich participants; preference was given to interviewing athletes who expressed medium to high levels of Athletic Identity. In the second institution, during phase one (information), and after having approached all teams whose AD, and later coaches, granted permission to do so, 13 teams and 198 student-athletes were approached in 13 different meetings. Fifty-six student-athletes, from that institution, filled out the forms required to participate in this study. Out of this number, three were disqualified due to having started their sport after the age of 12, and 19 were disqualified due to having a low AIMS score, leaving 34 student-athletes meeting the selection criteria. Therefore, between the two institutions, 35 student-athletes met the selection criteria stated above.

In addition to these criteria, the potential participants were chosen to include a diverse sample specifically in terms of gender and race, as well as in terms of culture, scholarship, and team vs. individual sport. Therefore, out of those 35 student-athletes, I selected nine student-athletes for the second phase (reflection) based on the information they provided during the first phase. There was a strong probability of having between six to eight actual participants, who matched the needs and requirements of a phenomenological inquiry. The goal was to add participants until enough information was gathered to allow themes to be identifiable and the breadth of experiences to be
exhausted (i.e. as new participants are interviewed, no new themes emerge) (Morrow & Smith, 2000).

The nine potential participants, who did fit the selection criteria were contacted by phone or email (Appendix I), depending on their preferences, and invited to participate in phase two of the study (reflection). Once those individuals agreed to participate, scheduled their initial interviews (by phone or email), and offered enough valuable information through their interview, the remaining participants were notified that they were not selected for phase two (reflection), and thanked for their interest (Appendix J). If I would have not ended up with enough participants to allow for themes to emerge and I still had new stories emerging through interviews, then I would have used the same process to ask the same coaches and athletes one more time to participate in my study. If this was of no avail, then I would have had to move on to a third Division I school, however this need did not arise.

Participants

Participants were six female and three male student-athletes. Two participants were African American, five were Caucasian, and two were Hispanic. At the time of recruitment, they ranged in age from 18 to 21, with six individuals being 21 years old. One participant was a freshman, one was a sophomore, three were juniors, and four were seniors. Six student-athletes played individual sports, while three were part of a team. The student-athletes were distributed amongst eight different sports: Diving, Golf, Swimming, Tennis, and Track, as well as Soccer, Softball, and Volleyball. Six participants were receiving athletic scholarships, one had an academic scholarship, one had both, and one had none. The participants declared having participated in athletics
since the age of five for one individual, the age of six for six individuals, the age of seven for one individual, and the age of nine for one individual. When asked about their success, two stated they were very successful, while five stated they were successful, and two stated they were not so successful. Finally, five student-athletes exhibited a medium level of Athletic Identity while four exhibited a high level of Athletic Identity as measured by the AIMS.

Data Collection Procedures

In the first phase of the study (information), participants were asked to read and sign the recruitment letter, representing the official version of the informed consent form, stamped and approved by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB; Appendix G). They were also asked to complete the background information form (Appendix E), which includes general demographics, years/length of experiencing the phenomenon, and number of sports played; and the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) (Appendix F). Participants were instructed to return all the forms, completed or not, to the drop box.

The second phase of this study (reflection) included five activities: an initial interview (Appendix K), journaling (Appendix L), review of initial research findings, a follow-up interview (Appendix M), and review of final results. I invited and interviewed nine student-athletes in the second phase. The goal of the two open-ended interviews was to recognize, explore and understand the essence of the Student Athlete Worldview, by asking the participants to reflect on their past and present, and how they viewed themselves as athletes, and more specifically as student-athletes. They were also asked to identify and describe themselves in terms of their perceived relationship to the world and
environment around them, such as other students, coaches, and professors, as well as with their family, culture, and the larger society. After the first set of interviews, I asked participants to keep a journal for two weeks (twice a week, for a total of four journal entries). Journals were intended to provide opportunities for additional self-reflection, about the way participants perceived the world around them, as a result of their athletic experiences and identity. I asked the participants to write their journals with the idea that their experiences as student-athletes may affect them as students and athletes, as well as in many other areas of their lives. The journaling was intended to help me gain additional understanding and allow the participants to continue their self-reflection about the topic.

Journaling was followed by follow-up interviews, in order to gain more depth of understanding, and generate feedback from participants about the initial findings. The participants were asked to read through a general summary of all the themes and ideas generated from initial review of the data generated by the first interviews and journals, prior to the follow-up interviews (Moustakas, 1994). Following these second interviews, participants were given an opportunity to review the final results of the study.

Initial Interviews

Phenomenologists believe that interviews are a good tool to use in order to explore and describe the essence of a phenomenon. Interviews are believed to be a very rich and varied source of interesting data, and should therefore be used as such (Creswell, 1998). In this context, I decided to use interviews in order to discover and describe the way student-athletes look at the world through their athletic experiences, and therefore explore and describe the essence of Athletic Identity, rather than focusing only on its level of salience.
In order for interviews to provide useful data, they must be conducted in a rigorous yet flexible manner. As a general rule, the goal of the interviews is to be flexible, yet structured, as well as mainly based on the interviewee. This can be done by preparing a few main questions, as well as possible probes to use (in a counseling-like way), and allowing the answers to speak for themselves, without interrupting or changing the processes (Morrow & Smith, 2000; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Therefore, the interviews for this study were semi-structured, open-ended and adaptable. Here semi-structured means that the initial content and process of the interviews were similar for all the participants, which increases the credibility of the study (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Moustakas, 1994; Polkinghorne, 1989). In addition, my doctoral committee reviewed the questions prior to initiation of data collection, in order to increase the likelihood that core aspects of the phenomenon being studied were addressed.

I used an open-ended and adaptable interviewing format for this study drawn primarily from Rubin and Rubin’s (1995) approach. This means that I had to be careful about how my own biases, attitudes, values, and Worldview could have potentially influenced the interview and/or relationship between the participants and myself. Rubin and Rubin believe that the examiner has a very important role during the interview process, and can therefore affect that process. They also believe that the examiner should not try to dominate the interview, and should therefore let the flow take its course, and later look at the themes that emerge. In addition, to this approach, I also used ideas from Creswell (1998), Lincoln and Guba (1985), Moustakas (1994), and Polkinghorne (1989), to help me become more fluent in the art of interviewing. As a final note, it must be noted that as a counselor, the art of interviewing was less foreign to me than to some qualitative
researchers, due to the fact that it has been part of my training for many years (Morrow & Smith, 2000).

I conducted the initial interviews face to face, in a neutral setting. I used a classroom in a private place that I was permitted access to, on campus, as it was impossible to reserve a room in the university library for two hours, to give me and the participant privacy, quiet time, and enough time to conduct the interview (Creswell, 1998; Polkinghorne, 1989). I taped the interviews, transcribed them verbatim and stored them, with a password, on my personal computer.

A few simple warm-up questions about the participant’s experience as a student-athlete started the interview (Appendix K), in order to break the ice and release some of the tension that the interviewee and interviewer may have. After that, I reminded the participants of the more focused purpose of my qualitative study. I did so by telling them that “not much is known about the identification and description of the unique attitudes, behaviors, values and skills student-athletes hold. So, I am interested in how you see, identify and portray yourself in terms of your relationship to the society at large and the world.” I also did let them know, that through our conversation I hoped to learn more about “how you look at the world through your athletic experiences.”

A few main in-depth and open-ended questions (Appendix K), such as (a) “As a student-athlete, how do you see yourself?” (b) “How would you describe yourself to others?”, (c) “What does it mean for you, what is it like for you, to be an athlete?”, (d) “There are studies about student-athletes, but I am interested in YOUR view of it and how you perceive it.”, (e) “What other aspects of yourself, besides being an athlete, are important to you?”, (f) “How does being a student-athlete fit in with other aspects of
(g) "What kind of strengths and weaknesses do you have as a student-athlete?" provided the central focus of the initial interview. Although the exact flow of the interviews was dependent upon individual participant responses, I did generally try to adhere to the interview plan shown in the appendices (Appendix K), in order to facilitate the flow of the interview. As stated earlier, the wording of each question was carefully thought out and planned, in order to keep them focused on the research questions as well as making sense to the interviewee. Naturally, it was important for me to remember to still remain flexible, in my use of the predetermined questions, in order to promote and maintain a conversational flow (Heppner, Kivlighan, & Wampold, 1999; Creswell, 1998; Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

Probes were sometimes used throughout the initial interview (Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Appendix N). Those probes were present to help the interviewee develop and explore an answer further. They were also very helpful, in that they helped the interviewee experience acknowledgement from me. Some of those probes were short questions like (a) "Tell me more about this", (b) "How was that for you?", and (c) "How did it feel?" If needed, my goal was to use those probes to bring back the interviewee to what "their" experience was, rather than student-athletes in general, with probes such as "How do you understand it and how do you feel about it?" and "How did, or does that influence you?"

The goal throughout the interview was to see how student-athletes view their specific Student Athlete Worldview. These open-ended semi-structured interviews, accompanied by probes, were intended to explore and describe the way student-athletes looked at themselves and the world through their athletic experiences. Therefore, the
Interviews’ goal was to explore and discover the Student Athlete Worldview, as student-athletes perceive it. Interviews established and answered: how do student-athletes perceive and experience themselves and the world as a result of their athletic experiences?

Journals

After the initial interviews, I asked the participants to keep a journal in order to elaborate about the way they perceive themselves and the world due to their athletic experiences and their Student Athlete Worldview (Appendix L). I asked them to continue to self-reflect for two weeks about how they feel that they perceive and experience the world around them, as a result of their past and current athletic experiences. I asked them to generate two typed entries per week, for a total of two weeks, and four entries. In order to know that their entries were not written all at once and submitted at the last second, I provided each participant with two stamped envelopes, which they were asked to return with two completed entries, on a CD-Write at the end of each week. In case I did not receive the requested journals at the specified time, I called and/or emailed them (depending on their preference) to remind them about the deadline. Lack of submission of journal entries did not preclude continued participation in the study.

Two participants did not return any journal entries, and one participant returned only two entries. I made sure to process this fact with two of the participants during the follow-up interviews, and asked them the reason for this lapse, which they explained as just “not thinking of it” and “being busy”. As for the third participant, I was unable to contact him by phone and/or email after numerous attempts. I was therefore unable to collect information about this participant’s journal and follow-up interview. However, I
do not believe that missing journal entries unduly limited the results, as the journal was not intended to be the main source of information, but rather an additional tool for them to be able to raise their own conscious awareness of their Worldview, so that it was more available for discussion in their follow-up interviews. In addition, the majority of participants did not generally report anything new in the journals, which changed the data analyzed throughout the initial interview. Only one student-athlete provided slightly different insight, which was occurring to him at the time, and which was incorporated in the results.

Throughout the journal entries, I asked the participants to reflect in a general way about "How do you perceive and experience the world around you, as a result of your past and present athletic experiences?" I also asked them to become more self-aware about their experiences in specific situations such as being in class, going out, grocery shopping, as well as any other specific situation they could have thought of. The goal was to allow the participants to use self-reflection to help me discover and describe Student Athlete Worldview in all areas of their lives, as well as an additional tool for them to be able to raise their own conscious awareness of their Worldview, so that it was more available for discussion in their follow-up interviews.

Follow-up Interviews

Journaling was followed by follow-up interviews, in order to gain more depth of understanding of the phenomenon being studied. The follow-up interviews entailed the participants reading through a general summary of initial research findings and themes, before the follow-up interview (Moustakas, 1994). Those findings, including themes and conceptions were established mainly with the help of Colaizzi's (1978) analysis.
procedures, which will be explained in detail in the Data Analysis Procedure section. Those themes and ideas, which emerged from the interviews and the journaling, first focused on understanding individual participants’ data, and then on developing an understanding of the group collectively. Themes were reviewed and explored further in the follow-up interviews, in order to include more in-depth answers from the participants, and therefore a clearer and more complete understanding of the phenomenon studied.

The participants were asked to read the summary of the themes collected, and during the follow-up interview (Appendix M) they were asked to first describe their “Initial reactions about reading the initial summary of the findings”. Also, in order to gain additional data and depth, participants were asked to think about (a) “How well does the summary of those themes capture your experiences as a student-athlete?”, (b) “Which theme(s) has impacted you the most, as you read the summary?”, and (c) “How do you relate (or not) to the summary of those themes”. Finally, participants were asked (d) “How else do you think that you view the world as a result of your athletic experience (if any), that is not in this summary?” and (e) “Are there any themes important to you, that I did not present in those findings?” As during the initial interviews, I did use probes (Appendix N) as a tool to develop and explore responses (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). During the follow-up interview, the participants were also asked some additional individualized questions, about ideas and thoughts that were either unclear to the examiner, missing or different than other student-athletes, during the first interview.

Once all data were analyzed, participants were given the opportunity to review the study results. Participants were asked (Appendix O) to review the specific personal quotes from both of their interviews and their journals that I included in my final paper,
in order to assure that their confidentiality was preserved if I used those specific quotes. Participants were also asked to comment on whether my presentation of their quotes fit for them, when included in the actual context in which it is used. If the participants had any concerns for confidentiality, or the quotes not fitting their general idea, I asked them to highlight those quotes, and let me know if they wanted me to remove them or simply change those passages.

Confidentiality

In order to ensure confidentiality, I changed the names of the participants and had student-athletes select pseudonyms to present the results. I also omitted mentioning the name of the institution that the student-athletes attended, due to the potential of having them recognized through public means such as radio shows, and television programs. Another important step I took to ensure the confidentiality of the participants was to only include specific demographic or other descriptive information about them when I described the group as a whole, but not when I discussed individuals in a specific manner. I also made sure not to allow identification of the individual participants, when reporting my results in the form of quotes. Therefore, specific words or phrases used during the interviews that could identify the athlete or their sport were changed to broad identifiers such as “student-athlete” or “non-revenue sport.” (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Moustakas, 1994).

As mandated by the HSIRB, during the study, I always stored the research information in a locked cabinet in my office, as well as used a password in order to store and retrieve information pertaining to the study, when using my computer. All of the information collected from the participants was kept confidential, and the research
materials were all coded. I kept a separate master list with the names of participants and the corresponding code numbers. In the beginning of the study, I informed the potential participants that once the data was collected and analyzed, the master list connecting code numbers to participant names would be destroyed. Other information, such as tapes used for the interviews, CD-WRITE and emails will be retained in a locked filing cabinet for a minimum of three years following conclusion of the study in the faculty advisor’s office at Western Michigan University. In accordance with the ethics code of the American Psychological Association, any data used in publication will be retained for a minimum of five years after publication (APA Code of Ethics, 2002; Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Moustakas, 1994).

Data Analysis Procedures

As Polkinghorne (1989) explained it, the focus of the phenomenological interview is theme oriented, “[it] seeks to describe and understand the meaning of the central themes of the experience being investigated” (p. 49). This means that qualitative researchers, and phenomenologists in particular, believe that the core concepts and descriptions of the participants need to be clearly and simply stated in themes representing the essence of the experience being explored, rather than interpreted by researchers. In this study, those themes and conceptions were established mainly with the help of Colaizzi’s (1978) five steps of analysis; procedures recommended by Van Kaam (1969), Giorgi (1985), Moustakas (1994), and Polkinghorne (1989) were also incorporated. The specific steps taken in order to establish themes and uncover the essence of participants’ experiences are described and explained below.
Steps

The first step requires the researcher to read all the data to “acquire a feeling for them, and [make] sense out of them” (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 59). In my study, I first read and analyzed the initial interviews during the month when the journals were being written. Later on, I read and analyzed the journals, and finally read and analyzed the follow-up interviews. As I read and analyzed the initial interviews, the journals, and the follow-up interviews, I first focused on understanding individual participants’ data, and then developed understanding of the group collectively. I made sure to keep track of my first impressions and the knowledge learned, by highlighting the original text, and recording reactions and thoughts on the transcripts on the computer.

The second step is identified as “extracting significant statements” (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 59) and involves finding and putting together statements that really speak to the phenomenon, while omitting other less significant topics such as getting to know each other. I first extracted significant statements that came from the initial interview and later extracted them from the journals and the follow-up interview (Polkinghorne, 1989). In a similar fashion as stated in step one, I first focused on understanding and extracting significant statements from individual participants’ data, and then developed an understanding of the group collectively. The extraction of significant statements was completed with the use of the QSR NUD*IST Version 7, which is a tool to “assist interpretation and coding, or Indexing, Searching text or patterns of coding and Theorizing about what’s seen and understood as the patterns become clearer” (QSR, 2004, p. 3). This tool was used for coding the data collected in the initial interviews, journaling and follow-up interviews.
The third step revolves around “formulating meanings” (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 59) about the extracted statements that the participants shared. This step is hard to do, because the researcher needs to “leap from what his subjects say to what they mean” (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 59), without jumping too far from the original meaning intended (Polkinghorne, 1989). This means that I pulled together interesting points from various places from the data collected throughout the research, and came up with the labels identified. All this information was synthesized and developed into themes. In order to maintain a systematic approach to the extraction of themes from the participants’ statements, I first read each individual transcript one at a time and separately, and identified potential themes. I then, through a second reading, read all transcripts from a particular step in the research back and forth, in the attempt to extrapolate and identify simultaneous emerging themes. Therefore, I first identified themes for individual participants, and then re-examined those themes and the original data to find collective or group themes.

The fourth step is designed to organize the formulated meanings into “clusters of themes” (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 59), and is often as delicate to achieve as step two. At that time, the researcher tries to cluster individual and similar themes together in order to obtain a more general or clustered list of themes which are reflected and found amongst all the participants. The researcher then continues to “move back and forth between the meaning statements and the successive revised hypothetical...lists, until the themes are accurately reflected in the clusters” (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 53).

The fifth and last step is to return to each participant and ask, “How do my descriptive results compare with your experiences?” (Colaizzi, 1978, p. 61-62). This
intermediate and final check up with the participants is important in order to make sure that all the prior steps kept the true meaning of the participants’ experiences (Polkinghorne, 1989). This was done during the follow-up interviews and through sharing of results following that follow-up interview. At the time of the follow-up interview, I presented the participants with a summary of themes, and asked them: (a) “How well does the summary of those themes capture your experiences as a student-athlete?” (b) “How do you relate (or not) to the summary of those themes”, and (c) “Are there any themes important to you, that I did not present in those findings?” All the participants agreed with the presentation of the results, clarified and elaborated on some of the meanings that the themes and ideas had for them.

Once all the data was analyzed and the results written, participants were given the opportunity to review the final study results. By email, participants were asked (Appendix O) to review the specific personal quotes from both of their interviews and their journals that I included in my final paper, in order to assure that my presentation of their quotes fit for them, when included in the actual context in which it was used. The participants confirmed that the quotes were being used as they had expressed during their interviews.

Therefore, in my study, I first read and analyzed the initial interviews during the month when the journals were written. Later on, I read and analyzed the journals, and finally read and analyzed the follow-up interviews. Throughout this reading and analyzing, I first focused in understanding individual participants data first, and then developed understanding of group collectively. The final results incorporate understandings from all three data sources. Finally, an auditor chosen for her knowledge
and experience in phenomenological studies and procedures, as well as some experience in working with student-athletes, reviewed all the analysis procedures, and examined the fit between the original data, and the themes, which emerged during my analysis. Those actions were instigated by the auditor with full access to any written notes that I had about the interview process and the analysis. This was done to increase the rigor of the analysis, and therefore the credibility of the study, and will be described further, in the upcoming section on rigor.

Tools

The tool that I used to perform the data analysis steps is the Qualitative Solutions and Research Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing, Searching, and Theorizing (QSR NUD*IST Version 7) computer software. This program enables the researcher to code and classify data, in order to more easily retrieve it to establish the themes that represent the essence of the phenomenon. Creswell (1998) explains that this type of computer program helps in analyzing large samples of data.

Rigor of the Study

I primarily used Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) approach to trustworthiness, in order to describe and establish the rigor of this study. In addition to this approach, I also incorporated suggestions from Creswell (1998), Morrow and Smith (2000), Marshall and Rossman (1995), and Rubin and Rubin (1995). Lincoln and Guba (1985) believe that quantitative and qualitative studies have fundamentally different approaches to generating knowledge, and therefore need different approaches to express and demonstrate rigor. This means that they replaced the terms and concepts of “internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 300),
with more suitable and appropriate ones termed "credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 300; Morrow & Smith, 2000).

The first criteria of rigor in qualitative research, is credibility; its goal is to "demonstrate that the inquiry was conducted in such a manner as to ensure that the subject was accurately identified and described" (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 143). In order to ensure an accurate identification of participants' experiences, a researcher can use any of the following procedures: careful design of data collection procedures, prolonged engagement, triangulation, member checks, and finally audit.

I ensured credibility in this study, by making sure to carefully manage the design of data collection procedures, which were carefully reviewed by my doctoral chair and committee. Prolonged engagement was also used in this study to increase credibility, by making sure to spend enough time with each participant, during interviews, journals, and follow-up interviews, in order to truly understand them and let them communicate their meaning and description of the phenomenon studied, and therefore capture the essence of the participants' experiences. An extended method was to use the interview and journal themes to incorporate a member check during the follow-up interviews. Triangulation was also an important tool in demonstrating credibility, and it was applied through having nine participants, as well as having two different methods of collecting data, which confirmed some data and yielded some additional information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Rubin and Rubin (1995) also believe that the similarity of the questions, as well as the reviewing of the questions, data, analysis and findings, by the doctoral chair throughout the research process, increase the rigor of the interviews, and therefore the credibility of
the study. The doctoral chair managed this process by offering guidance and suggestions throughout the data collection and analysis. During the data collection, the doctoral chair reviewed and confirmed the steps taken and that the study’s initial focus was preserved. The doctoral chair helped to review all the analysis procedures, and examined their fit between the original data and the themes, which emerged during my analysis, and which she found were consistent with the transcripts. Finally, an auditor reviewed all the analysis procedures, and examined their fit between the original data, and the themes, which emerged during my analysis; findings from the auditor will be described in the upcoming section on rigor.

The second criteria of rigor in qualitative research, is transferability; its goal is to “demonstrate the applicability of one set of findings to another context” (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 143). Lincoln and Guba (1985) believe that transferability can be established only through a clear description of the setting, population and situations being investigated, and therefore supply a complete summary of the participants and their surroundings. In addition, Rubin and Rubin (1995) consider that it is important to provide rich and extensive description of results, in order to maintain transferability. I did that in this study, by collecting demographic information, which I reported in the results and discussion section of this study. In those two sections, I used extensive description in the presentation of the results.

The third criteria of rigor in qualitative research, is dependability; its goal is to “attempt to account for the changing conditions in the phenomenon chosen for study, as well as changes in the design created by increasingly refined understanding of the setting” (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 145). Lincoln and Guba (1985) believe that
caution needs to be taken in order to maintain the main and initial meaning of the essence of the phenomenon, as well as maintaining the primary use of the data collection. In other words, it is important for the study to stay close to the raw data, by making it transparent how the data connects to the findings, in order to capture the true essence of the phenomenon studied. This was done in this study, by using an auditor, who reviewed all the analysis procedures, and their fit between the original data and the emerging themes. Dependability was also maintained by the doctoral advisor reviewing the project data, in order to monitor that the procedure was being implemented the way it was designed. In addition, the doctoral advisor helped maintain dependability by reviewing analysis procedures and findings.

The last criteria of rigor in qualitative research, is confirmability; its goal is to “demonstrate that the findings of the study could be confirmed by another” (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 145). Lincoln and Guba (1985) believe that using an auditor is the best and strongest way to ensure that the study is displaying an unbiased view of the participants’ experiences, which in turn will allow the data to “help confirm the general findings and lead to the implications [made]” (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 145). Confirmability was attended to in this study, by using an auditor, who reviewed all the analysis procedures, and examined their fit between the original data and the themes, which emerged during my analysis. In order to accomplish that, the auditor was given full access to any written notes that I had about the interview process and the analysis. After the final results were written, the auditor, again was given full access to all written notes, and examined the fit and progress between all sequential information.
As a first outcome, the auditor stated that all the coding made sense throughout, and that the development of themes and ideas was consistent with the transcripts. In other words, she stated that she did not find any data that was left out, missing, or misplaced, and that most importantly, the sequencing of data analysis and presentation of results made perfect sense. A second outcome from the auditor is that she suggested that I not only look at common themes that emerged in the analysis, but also that I may consider looking at a couple of outliers, and therefore at the diversity of voices as well. This was considered, however, the main emphasis of this phenomenological study was to look at common emerging themes. As Polkinghorne (1989) stated the job of phenomenological study is that “[it] seeks to describe and understand the meaning of the central themes of the experience being investigated” (p. 49). Therefore, a focus on common and aggregate meanings, experiences and themes were of interest in this case, rather than outliers. Thus no revisions were made based on this suggestion from the auditor.
CHAPTER III

RESULTS

This chapter offers a descriptive picture about student-athlete’s view of the world, and illustrates the way student-athletes look at the world through their athletic experiences, which will be generally described as Student Athlete Worldview (SA WV). An initial interview, journaling, and a follow up interview were conducted with nine participants, described earlier as college student-athletes in a Division I school, participating in non-revenue or non-tier-one sports, who were active in sport since prior to age 12. The participants were asked to reflect on their past and present, and how they view themselves as athletes, and more specifically as student-athletes. They were also asked to identify and describe themselves in terms of their perceived relationship to the world and environment around them, such as being in class, going out, other students, as well, as life plans, culture, and society, as a result of their athletic experiences and identity.

Due to the qualitative nature of the research question, I used a phenomenological inquiry method to investigate, explore and describe the essence of Student Athlete Worldview, which was established by identifying the common themes that appeared across the participants’ stories. Those common themes were depicted by the core ideas and the important elements that emerged during the analysis of the initial interviews and journals, and were present in the majority of narratives. Furthermore, those ideas and elements were also agreed upon, by the majority of participants, during the follow up
interviews. Core ideas and important elements are identified and described in this chapter, and are depicted with the help of quotes shared by the participating student-athletes. While not comprehensive, the quotes used in this chapter were chosen to best describe the common and emerging themes, and more specifically the essence of Student Athlete Worldview, as viewed and described by student-athletes. In order to keep adequate confidentiality, pseudonyms are used for all nine participants, and specific words or phrases used during the interviews that could identify the athletes or their sport were changed to broad identifiers such as “athletes” or “non-revenue sport”, or simply taken out.

This chapter consists of three distinctive sections identifying the core ideas and the important elements experienced, identified and described by student-athletes, as being at the heart of their Student Athlete Worldview. The first section of this chapter identifies the intrapersonal aspects of being a student-athlete; or the experiences recognized by student-athletes as occurring within themselves. This section encompasses work ethic, internal drive, self knowledge, and commitment, and was depicted by athletes as fundamental to their core beliefs. The second section of this chapter identifies the interpersonal aspects of being a student-athlete; or the experiences recognized by student-athletes involving relations between themselves and others around them. This section encompasses the sense of being better than others, having a sense of connection, receiving benefits and acquiring assets, which were described by athletes as an inherent part of being a student-athlete. The third section of this chapter identifies the sacrificing and restricting aspects of being a student-athlete; or the pressures and sacrifices that student-athletes perceive as ever present in their life. It also describes how student-
athletes may experience a constant lack of freedom, as well as difficulties in managing their time and living up to continuous expectations, and was depicted by athletes as deep-seated in their way of being.

Intrapersonal Aspects of Being a Student-Athlete

Student-athletes in this sample depicted the many positive inner qualities they possess and have come to cherish throughout their athletic years, as being at the core of who they are today, not only as athletes, but also as students and human beings. The participants believed these dispositions were as much a part of who they became as student-athletes, as the practical skills their coaches have taught them throughout the years. Student-athletes described these qualities as discipline, hard work, determination and a general drive to better themselves that they experienced throughout their athletic career, and believed to be at the core of their Student Athlete Worldview. Sarah emphasized this broad idea when she stated:

“You know what, if you go to practice every single day, you’ve got that drive, like, you got that thing inside you. ... It’s like, I’m like, I, it’s a competitive drive, it’s everything. It’s like the heart, I give it everything I have.”

Work Ethic

Student-athletes in this sample described a hard work ethic and discipline, as being at the core of their Student Athlete Worldview. Jenny, a Caucasian junior in a team sport, highlighted the roots of a hard work ethic best by stating: “I look at myself and I think that I am hard worker, because I am a student-athlete”, and also added that: “…in my view of a student-athlete, they are hard working, they’re someone that is trying to
achieve all those ideal student-athlete’s goals”. In a similar vein, when asked what an ideal student-athlete should be like, Bob, a Caucasian senior in an individual sport, matched many of the other eight participants’ thoughts and descriptions, saying: “An ideal student-athlete ... [is] someone who works hard 100% of the time.” Sarah, a Hispanic senior in an individual sport, went even deeper into her self-description of being a student-athlete, when she stated: "I don't even know if I have natural talent. I think it's just because I got here, because I worked so fricking hard.”

While a hard work ethic was the strongest theme to emerge amongst the sample of participants, determination and dedication were also strongly connected to it, as Blondie, a Caucasian sophomore in an individual sport, emphasized:

“I mean hard work ethic like, that's just basically wanting it or not. You're gonna give it your all, if you, if this is what you really want, you're gonna give it your all. You're gonna give it your complete determination, you know, you, you, you don’t care about anything else, but, but your sport, and making yourself better.”

Nicole, an African American junior in an individual sport, also spoke of determination and dedication as being prerequisites to being a student-athlete: “... I'm use[d] to putting in time so I won't just give up even if it’s getting hard or something I don’t really want to do, I'll just usually follow it through, see it through.” Jenny expressed a similar idea, stating: “... a strength would be that, depending on the situation, I may be able to overcome different obstacles a little more easily. When the going gets tough, you know, I may be able to push through a little better.” Jenny also emphasized hard work in participating in her sport, as a source of pride: “I think that I work hardest at being an athlete, so that's where my pride comes from, from working hard, so that's where it's most
easy for me to talk about." This seems to suggest that being able to go through great hardships and hard work is viewed as a normal end result of being a student-athlete.

Finally, having heart, or that extra thing inside you, was believed by participants as being an essential element of hard work, and as being at the core of their Student Athlete Worldview. Not only to become great at one’s sport, but most importantly to be able to work hard and dedicate one’s life to athletics, day in and day out. Nicole described this by saying:

The amount of work we do. I think it exceeds all … at least what I’ve seen in the time. A lot of people have so much heart, but it’s just so demanding to where you just don’t have time for anything else.

Rachel, an African American junior in a team sport, also emphasized this point, when she stated:

You have to yourself like, be out there, working hard, to try to make yourself better … but if you don’t have heart it doesn’t matter. Like, you can’t just be out there and go through the motions. I think it’s the people that have more heart, that try to, that end up doing better in the long run.

As participants established and Sarah highlighted, the most central and essential themes comprising the essence of their Student Athlete Worldview, were: “Determination, work ethic, and heart, I think. Heart also.”

*Internal Drive*

Participants in this sample described competitive drive and love of competition as being at the core of their Student Athlete Worldview. The participants emphasized having internal drive and being competitive as being essential and an engrained element of their
identity as student-athletes. Karin, a Caucasian senior in a team sport, described this feeling well, when she stated:

I’m way more competitive than most of my friends. Way more competitive. Most of my friends are [my sport’s] players but the ones that aren’t, are not that competitive … I just think that I am very, very competitive in anything. It could be best handwriting and I’m going to try to beat you.

Participants also described feeling that their sport amplified their competitiveness, as Sarah stated: “I think, that [my sport] has really made me competitive”. When asked what they liked about their sport, the participants’ initial answer was often “the competition” as Clark, a Hispanic senior in an individual sport, answered. Often, when asked to disclose more information about their competitive drive, the athletes described a love of competing and winning. Blondie, highlighted this very well in her statement: “The competitive field and when you are just totally dominating somebody out there on the [playing field]. It’s like a natural high. I miss it”. Sarah also highlighted the power of competition, when she stated “I thrive off that one part, where … I thrive off the race, to catch somebody, you know.”

While competitive drive and love of competition were central themes highlighted and emphasized by the sample of participants, having ambition and motivation toward improvement surfaced as very strongly connected to that drive, and their quest to be better student-athletes. Barney, a Caucasian freshman in an individual sport, shared his thoughts and experiences about it, when asked if he thought he was an ideal student-athlete:

You can always get better at something. I guess there really isn’t an ideal student-
athlete, just keep trying to make yourself better, better all around ... I don't have a 4.0 GPA, so that is always something to work on. There is always time to drop, so, I guess I'm always progressing toward trying to be ideal ... there is always room for improvement ... you can still drop time and get faster. Start taking harder classes ... there is always something.

Clark explained this motivation to succeed, this internal drive, to do and be better, not merely as closely related to athletes’ competitive drive, but generally as a fundamental internal need to push toward higher achievements: “all the athletes want, you know, on their nature they strive to get better and better every time.” Sarah also commented on the importance of this theme, saying: “they [the athletes], they're always willing to change ... do stuff to always better themselves. They're not like, I'm too good to take that ...” and “you want to, you want to be the best person you can be.”

Being goal oriented, changing one’s goals when needed, and trying hard to reach those goals, was an aspect of internal drive that participating student-athletes also described and expressed. This perspective was best explained and described by Bob:

When I was younger I set a goal, to [be] in the Olympics and I realize I may never achieve that goal, and then I want to achieve the highest goal to my standard ... being [in] a Division I school, that became the goal. ... I still want to work hard and then [improve] my personal best, I still want to drop my time.

In a similar vein, the student-athletes believed hard work, testing themselves and their abilities to reach their goals, were all a part of their internal drive. As Jenny reported:

It's allowed me to set high goals, and not be afraid to just keep working towards them. ... I've made it to be a student-athlete, a college student-athlete, a full
scholarship student-athlete, and I mean, that was my big goal when I was a kid, was to be a full ride Division I athlete, and, to have achieved that goal by itself makes me feel very successful.

Self Knowledge

Student-athletes in this sample described self confidence and consequently knowing themselves as a direct result of being a student-athlete. The participants reported that this confidence came from their experiences in their sport, and was at the core of their Student Athlete Worldview. As Sarah so clearly stated: “I feel that [my sport] has given me the confidence I need to know I will succeed when I know that I have put time, effort and focus into whatever I do.” Nicole also stated: “I think being involved in athletics does, you know, give you a certain amount of confidence.” Some of the athletes also added that those feelings of confidence often came hand in hand with some of the themes described earlier, as Sarah declared: “I always want to push and find out. Like, I know I can do better”. Blondie also emphasized this when she said:

knowing I can do it, know I have done it, think about it, and try to execute it …

they’re all related. Like, if you have confidence it will lead to building character, and having, having a positive attitude out there. To me confidence is everything.

In other words, the participating student-athletes highlighted the fact that this personal knowledge of being capable, good or even great, came from within themselves, and was a result of accumulated years of hard work. They believed that the elements of a strong work ethic and internal drive became a self-perpetuating circle that enabled confidence to emerge. As Blondie shared: “to me self-confidence is something you only
can give yourself ... the perfect athlete is just ... you have self confidence and you don’t need anybody to reinforce that.” Barney also expressed it when he stated:

Knowing that you have an edge gives you confidence. ... It’s kind of hard to explain. I guess knowing that you’ve gone through all this, your whole life ... Like your competitive edge ... and your ambition. If you’ve already pushed through ... and following through with ... all the work you’ve done to make it pay off eventually.

While student-athletes emphasized knowing themselves, and more importantly knowing how good and capable they are, they also highlighted this as something they kept to themselves and did not brag about. Blondie stated: “You know [that you have self confidence], but you don’t brag about it, you don’t get cocky about it.” Student-athletes described their tendency to want people to see and find out how good they are, rather than having to tell them. Rachel highlighted this by saying: “I’m not going to be like, “Yeah, I’m great, fast and amazing”. You just kind of let them see you at the game and they are like “oh man, you are really good”. So it’s better to show them than actually tell them.” At last, Karin shared a quote which emphasized student-athletes’ tendency to gravitate toward modesty:

There is a quote ... it’s: “leadership cannot be announced, it has to be demonstrated”. [So], I can’t just come in here and say, well I'm good, and I work hard. I'm always gonna work hard. You know, you have to see that. I’d feel cocky if I said that to you.

Finally, the participants also highlighted themes such as being able to adapt and having great attitudes as central attributes in increasing their confidence and consequently
better knowing themselves, hence increasing their chances for success. As Sarah shared:

"The ideal student-athlete knows the balance, knows themselves, and then knows how to adapt and change and work ... and adapt to ... situations." Clark also stated:

In a way you have to become a little bit emotionally detached with things, just isolate everything you don’t like ... and just stay in the positive. Because if you stay in the negative side, you are going to end up taking yourself down with it ... with life, you know that nothing is perfect and you have to deal with whatever comes with it. You have to learn how to live with the bad side of things.

Likewise, Karin highlighted those attributes: “you know you messed up. Nobody has to tell you that you messed up ... you have to be positive about it. You have to turn something negative into positive, and say you're not gonna do it next time.”, and added:

It’s already in the past. We can’t change it now, we can’t play would have, could have, should have, we have to move on with our lives. See what we did in the past that’s bad, change for the future, and make sure that we can really take a grip on that and move forward.

Participants’ knowledge of self further led to their ability to become fully responsible for their own actions. As Bob shared:

... I’ve learned how to really take responsibility, ... When you don’t get faster, it’s usually your fault for not going to practice, drinking too much beer, not training hard enough, slipping [out of view] for a set of two. ... Failing is okay, but having excuses for everything is just not acceptable. Excuses; it seems like everyone else has excuses for everything.
Their knowledge of self also seemed to lead them to their ability to know the responsibilities they have toward others. As Jenny shared, “I know [everything] I have to do and who I have to answer to. It makes me proud of myself, I … have obligations and I meet them.”

*Commitment*

Student-athletes in this sample described loving their sport as a crucial and central part in their commitment to their sport. The participants also emphasized commitment, in their quest to excellence, as being at the core of their Student Athlete Worldview. Jenny used poetic words to describe her love: “I still love [my sport] to death and it’s still what makes me breathe”. Blondie also spoke of her love for her sport as a part of her: “Overall, I love being a student-athlete because I love sports. I love [my sport] … I can’t really see my life without sport, really. I love sports, I love every sport. I’ll watch anything and play anything. I love them.” Linking back to the earlier themes in this section, participants also highlighted their effort in excelling and always wanting to get better as their source in loving their sport. As Sarah stated:

It's about enjoying life, and, it's more like you've got, you have to suffer. … Life is coming to a point where it's … easy, more easy to do things. It's a drive-through restaurant, it's, it's, you know, it's a coffee machine, you just press the button and it's ready. But it's [sport] more like feeling like you're just putting your body at the maximum. … some people can go through life and not even know what the maximum pushing point of their life is ever going to be. … sport just makes it more, like, … that satisfaction you get from, like "oh my God, I can't believe I did that". … that extra push physically wise, and mentally wise, because it's, it's got a
mental game. Like, you're like “oh my god I am on top of the world, I am on top of the world.”

The participants also emphasized their love and hate relationship with their sport, at some time in their career, as a central part of their commitment as student-athletes. They underlined the fact that love of sport must be the stronger of the two in order to dedicate one’s life to athletics. Nicole shared this by declaring: “The love and the hate for [my sport]! ... you’re all tired sometimes, and you don’t want to be there, but ... but you still have the same love for the sport, and you know why you are out there.” She also added:

... I went through stages. Sometimes I would get burned out a little bit because I started too young ... but at the same time it was never anything I wanted to give up and I always liked [my sport]. I always enjoyed the sport and I would definitely miss it if I was not [doing it].

Likewise, Blondie described her mixed feelings: “I’ve had times where I just, I want to be like I’m done with this, but then I still love the sport and don’t want to quit”, after which she added “…you got to enjoy and love what you do, because if you don’t there is no point in doing it. You’re just, running yourself into a wall.”

Finally, the student-athletes described the influence that participating and being able to commit to their sport had on their life and how essential this was to their Student Athlete Worldview. Karin shared this in a compelling manner when she stated:

It probably influences everything, when you think about it. Because you, I want to stay healthy, so I eat healthy, and I don’t want to go out and go ice skating, because I don’t want to get hurt, and [pause] just everything. It has to influence
everything, because my life revolves around it. It’s, it’s 25 hours a week, it’s like a part time job. … that’s a lot of time. … you have to work your schedule around it sometimes. That has to be when you eat, what you eat, when you go to bed, when you wake up, what you watch on TV if you want to see your friends … you know.

Similarly, Rachel expressed the influence of her sport, almost as a part of who she is:

“That’s just what I do all day, everyday, practice, games. That’s just, I don’t know, after a while it just becomes you. I have been doing it for so long.” Nonetheless, student-athletes in this sample also repeated how their love for their sport was such a crucial element in enduring the hardships of their sports, day in and day out, as Blondie shared: “I’ve had a really tough, tough couple, first month really. And then Sunday I went and [had a new move], and I just, it’s like I fell in love with it all over again.” Jenny further emphasized: “Then I remember that it is all worth it, all the work is worth it to play the sport I love.

Interpersonal Aspects of Being a Student-Athlete

Student-athletes in this sample depicted the many positive aspects and benefits they experienced and enjoyed throughout their athletic years, as being essential and important to who they are today. Student-athletes described those qualities as being unique and special, feeling connected through a deep understanding and similarities with other athletes, and earning important benefits and rewards, which they experienced throughout their athletic career, and believed to be a strong part of their Student Athlete Worldview. Blondie emphasized this state of uniqueness and pride, when she stated: “I don’t know what the percentage rate is, but not everyone is … a collegiate athlete. When I see those NCAA … commercials, and they’re like something percent will go
professional in something percent sport. I saw the commercial and my mom went like
“oh, Blondie, you’re part of that”.... I’m part of the NCAA, and however many there are.
You know ... I’m part of that percentage.” Bob also highlighted this general state, as he stated:

... to be a student-athlete, I mean you feel like you’re a part of something. I know
I definitely feel like I’ll always be a part of [my University’s] ... and [my sport’s
team]. ...That makes me feel good and makes me feel like I belong somewhere.

Being Apart

Student-athletes in this sample declared that their athletic status set them apart
from other college students, and was at the core of their Student Athlete Worldview.
Sarah shared: “Being a student-athlete makes myself feel as though I am different than
your normal student or young adult for that matter.” Similarly, Jenny stated: “I think that
being a student-athlete does set me apart from everyone else, you know.” As the
participants described feeling apart, they also emphasized the joy they derived from this
differentiation between themselves and others. Blondie highlighted this position when
she stated:

I feel part of that little percentage that not everyone gets a chance to say they’re a
student-athlete. I like it. ... It gives you a feeling that makes you feel good,
because not everyone gets the chance to be one. I did.

Jenny went a little bit further when she stated: “This feeling of importance helps me feel
good about what I do and what I have worked for.”, as she connected feeling good as a
merit to her hard work.
In addition to enjoying being unique, student-athletes also noted their beliefs in being special, in being part of an exceptional group; an elite group, as Nicole described:

In a way, it’s almost like sometimes you feel superior to other people. I don’t know if it’s because of strength, like I love being in shape obviously, but I feel like I have some form of superiority just because, just what I can do sometimes. … Maybe you feel like, almost like you’re special.

Blondie agreed and stated: “I just like being a student-athlete. I feel, not that I’m looked up to, but I feel higher than average or higher than just normal and you know, you have a lot of just students and I’m a student-athlete.” Participating student-athletes also described feeling better about themselves and having higher confidence as a result of being part of that elite group. Blondie shared her thoughts on those positive feelings:

“I’m part of a selected few … not only here at [my University] but throughout the whole country. So that helps me feel better about myself, in thinking that … I’m in the top percentage of kids today.” Barney echoed these ideas, stating: “It feels good to know that you are an athlete and just to know that you have an edge over everybody else.”

Furthermore, the participants added that others, especially potential employers, also seemed to view student-athletes as a special group, with many positive attributes. Nicole described it this way:

I think the regular student body has some kind of a higher respect for athletes. …

I think … probably the men’s sport like football and basketball get more attention, but I think that everyone respects athletes. Because they know that it takes a lot of hard work, and not everyone can do it or they probably would.

Bob also highlighted this phenomenon when he shared:
I'm in a fraternity and a lot of my fraternity brothers really know how hard I work and I think they have extra respect for me. I feel like they really do respect me more than if I was just an average person they met. And they see that, I think they see something bigger in me than they do in other people.

In a similar vein, Blondie shared the experience she had as a freshman, when she had to take a mandatory skills workshop class for all athletes, where they were taught to make the most of their athletic status:

They had us make out resumes. We went to one thing like an interview like this for jobs, and basically I felt like they beat in my head you are better off being a student-athlete, because your employer will know you had to balance school and a job and practice and competition. So you have responsibility, you know how to manage your time. Kind of like you may be better off, just one step ahead of someone else.

Finally, the participants commented on their desire to be special, to stand out in a crowd, and more specifically amongst college students, as Blondie stated:

I want to be above the normal totem pole. ... I just want to be one better, than everyone else. ... Because that's just my drive, that's just who I am. ... I don't just want to be mixed into a crowd, like I want to stand out. ... I just don't want to be any standard Joe Schmoe.

In a similar vein, Bob spoke about wanting to set himself apart, not only because he enjoys that feeling, but also to be recognized by others and leave a trace behind:

It feels good. It feels good being important and just like it feels good being a winner. It feels better when people look up to you. ... I really wanted it. I'm
leaving something behind, leaving a legacy and people know who you are behind you. It makes you feel more important, makes you feel better about yourself. People come up and they know who you are without you knowing them. … [that’s] the best feeling.

Clark went even further when he expressed his desire to be special and recognized as a way for him to be somebody: “you want to be the best you can be, and be remembered. Because, you know, people forget about certain people, and you want to become someone.”

**Sense of Connection**

Student-athletes in this sample also described their sense of connection to all fellow athletes, and more specifically their teammates, as being an important element of their Student Athlete Worldview. The participants clearly described their first encounters with their new teams and teammates as making instant connections, as having instant families and mini-communities, as well as having a sense of belonging. For example, Rachel stated:

After really sitting down and thinking about the differences between a student-athlete and a regular student. I am glad that I am a student-athlete. Just over all it gives you a sense of belong[ing] during the years in college. As soon as you start school you immediately have a family, your team.

Karin also emphasizes this sentiment, as she describes her experiences:

I see people in the walkway and they have their warm-ups on. I say oh, they are student-athletes. Hey, we say [to] each other. That’s like a built in community of people. You know when you are coming to college as a student-athlete, you have
a built in community of people that you are going to hang out with automatically. Not like some people coming to college have to make all new friends. You come to college as a student-athlete. You are like oh, I have a social group. … It’s like a mini-society within the school’s society, within the society of [our city], within the society of [our State], within the society of America.

Furthermore, the participants added that their sense of connection was often based on the common grounds and goals that they shared with their teammates, as well as the incredible daily camaraderie and the lasting bonds formed throughout their years of pursuit of their goals. Sarah shared:

Relating myself to a relationship that I had with a non-athlete I feel as though they don’t know the feeling of a sports related camaraderie. Maybe you can get a sense of it working in a school group but nothing compared to working on something that all of you choose to do.

Likewise, Nicole emphasized similar feelings: “it’s not the same. You’re gonna have friends, and you might have similar interests, but it’s just different when you all are competing together, and practicing together everyday.” Rachel also described the incredible sense of connection that she experienced as a result of her athletic life:

I think mostly the friends that I have through [my sport] I’ll keep in touch with them probably longer than the people I went to high school with. … it’s like you are always with these kids. … you travel with them, you are with them for 40 hours straight. … you meet all their family who comes to the games, you travel to hotels, so you just know everyone. You are more involved in their life than I am with just a friend that I knew in high school. … I don’t think, you ever lose that
bond, ... no matter how long you go without seeing them, ... once you spend that much time, ... you connect. ... we all have like a common bond, it was all like, we were on a team, so we all have the same goals, like we all share the same things.

In addition, to having common grounds and camaraderie, the student-athletes in this sample also described a deep sense of understanding from their fellow athletes, and more specifically their teammates, as being part of that strong sense of connection. The participants described this as being an important element of their Student Athlete Worldview. Blondie described this clearly when she said: “It’s easier to have friendships with people that are athletes, because they understand.” Barney also described this well, when he stated:

They just know what you are going through. They know it’s hard sometimes. They know like if you can’t go out on the weekend because you are getting close to a … meet. They understand those kinds of things. You can talk to them about the sport. They will know what you are talking about and things like that. ... You don’t have to explain …”

Rachel also highlighted this understanding of each other’s experiences, and the outcome derived from it:

... just because you’re all going through the same thing kind of. So when you see them, you just ... you are all stressed out about practice and games, and everybody is so tired. So it’s kind of like ... it’s good because you can always relate to them.
At last, Jenny highlighted the importance of this understanding, as she denounced the reaction she often gets from other students:

Athletes understand that you are balancing a lot of things on your plate and realize that it is really difficult to get it all done. The regular student, however, maybe say, Oh, it's just your sport, who cares. ... It is so much easier to relate to other student-athletes than the traditional student.

Finally, the student-athletes commented on the support and encouragement, as well as the ability to depend on their teammates as another important aspect of their sense of connection. Karin described that support this way: “We love each other and hate each other at times, but we are always there for each other.”; “I don’t think I would be motivated to do anything by myself. ... you can run and stuff by yourself, but when you are with your teammates, it’s different because they are pushing you.” Bob felt strongly when he described how an ideal student-athlete should be there for his fellow athletes, when they needed it:

Helps their fellow athlete out, if they get their homework done and someone on the team is having a hard time, they help them out. Doesn’t go to his room and go to sleep and get an extra hour of sleep while his buddy struggles. It’s important to help you[r] teammates out, especially if they are struggling.

Likewise, Sarah described doing just that, and being there for her teammates:

I want people to look at me and be like “if I need, if I call, if I need something at some particular moment, like my car is broken down the road, then Sarah is always going to be there to get me, no matter what. Like, I don’t care if we
haven’t been talking, I don’t care, I’m there if you need me, I’m there on the team if you need me, I'll give it my best.

Clark also highlighted the support that teammates give each other, especially when their sport interferes with academics:

... you know that everything is complicated and how the student-athlete business works like, because you have to do school and sports. So [student-athletes] help you out if you miss a class. They know why it is, and what’s the reason behind it [is], so they are more helpful

Nicole also commented on this deep sense of connection: “it’s just like a nice group. You’re like sisters, kind of. You’re friends, you support each other …”

**Benefits and Assets**

Participants in this sample believed that their athletic status facilitated many benefits and privileges, hence setting them apart from other college students, and as being an important element of their Student Athlete Worldview. Clark stated that: “being an athlete gives you certain privileges, and special equipment, special everything that you don’t need to pay for.” Student-athletes shared that the access to staff and resources made their life a little easier and a little less stressful. Rachel highlighted this by saying:

We have a lot more help. If you need a tutor, you don’t have to go pay, you don’t have to search for it. All you do is put in your request and they will email you and tell you where you need to meet her. .... if I had to go find a tutor, I would never, I don’t know where to go. Here they go find it for you. They keep up with you and all your classes so they know how you are doing along the way. .... So I think that’s the best part. You get a lot more help and stuff like that.
Nicole also added: "You get perks like, they get your books for you, and you don’t have to wait in line for stuff like that." Rachel also described the infrastructures placed around student-athletes as a benefit:

There is someone there to take care of all your stuff. If you have to go to the doctor, they make you an appointment. If you get sick and your mom is not there, you can call your trainer at 12:00. So someone is always watching out for you in school and on a day to day basis. ... You have your coach about [your sport], you have your trainers, you have your athletic people, and you have your counselors. You really get a lot more than the average student, who meets with their advisor and register[s] for classes.

The participants also emphasized their love for traveling and being able to earn a scholarship, as being an important element of their Student Athlete Worldview, and as an incredible reward and advantage. As Rachel shared: "Being a student-athlete opens many doors that are not available to just the average college student. For example you get [to] travel around and see most of the country."; "You get to go places. We travel. We went to L.A. and went to San Francisco and next year we are going to open up in San Diego. You get to go places and you don’t pay for it." Nicole also highlighted her love of travel: "Traveling, I gotten to travel a lot of different places. That was always really fun you know." In addition to the joy of travel, Blondie shared the pride of having an athletic scholarship, as being a big part in her Student Athlete Worldview:

You get to travel and go places, and eat a lot of food at the school’s expense, ... [but also] this year, when I signed my scholarship, that was a big plus because it truly made me feel like I’m a student-athlete and now when people are like “are
you on scholarship?” I can say yes. Before I was like, “no, but I’m playing for them”. That made a big change, a big difference. You know my own personal feelings and my self confidence, like I’m getting paid to do something. You know, it makes you feel good. I have my job making money, but I am also able to make money and have them pay for my schooling that I like doing. So it’s not really like a job. I enjoy it and I get paid to do it.

Likewise, Jenny described the incredible advantage in stress reduction by receiving a scholarship: “that stress [of doing my sport] is worth [it], you know. I have free school. I'm not going to have any loans when I get out of college”. Clark summed it up as a give and take: “You got your scholarship, you got to play, you got what you needed, so it’s a trade off.”

Finally, the student-athletes described the influence of structure, organization, and planning as an important aspect of being a student-athlete, and as a tool that prepared them for the world after sport. They also described other skills, such as communication skills as important assets developed throughout their years of athletic pursuit. Sarah stated: “I think every athlete has some sort of a structured, or organization thing, because you have to time manage yourself, to get to practice and stuff.” Blondie described this aspect of her life well:

I had to be organized, had to be more prepared, and keep my stuff together. … it keeps you more organized and more focused, on the task at hand, and what you have to get done. You can’t procrastinate. … Being a student-athlete, I feel it has prepared me a little more than the average Joe going to school. I feel I am prepared in the sense that I have a better understanding of what my superiors
expect from me. … it gets you more prepared for the real world.

Karin also highlighted other skills mastered from her athletic life:

You learn social skills from being on a team. … There is a different relationship when you are on the field. There is a different relationship when you are off the field and you have to learn how to manage those two relationships. How to manage your relationship with people in general. How to talk to them and what’s okay to say. It’s very much social as much as it is sports.

Clark also noted some helpful outcomes that sport engendered: “It helps you in business with people, communication skills out of the [sport]. They will teach you, mostly when working in a company usually have groups and things, you are familiar with them.”

Rachel also added that sport not only gives you better communication skills, but also better job connections:

I’ve learned through [my sport], like, how to talk to people better, you know how to get my point across. … [but also] playing a sport gives you … connections for when you get out of school. Many people that watch have watch you play and become fans are willing to help you when get your degree.

**Stereotypes**

Student-athletes in this sample described being stereotyped, by students, teachers, advisors, and others around campus, as being an important element of their Student Athlete Worldview. The participants clearly described first encounters with people they did not know, as often feeling prematurely judged. Karin stated that:

People know who student-athletes are, they can make their…it’s usually a first decision for them, whether or not they like athletes. Then they decide during the
class whether or not they like that person. That can be a strength or a weakness.

Jenny also described that feeling when she stated: “Well, sometimes I think that athletes are foreseen as being, you know, one way, you know, jockey, I don’t care about anybody else but myself.” She added: “sometimes if you’re [known as] an athlete from the beginning, the stereotypes are there right away, and people don’t really try to get to know you as well.” In addition to those general stereotypes, the student-athletes expressed often being referred to specifically as not being smart, as Nicole shared: “I just think, you know how sometimes people think that athletes have the dumb jock thing, or that they’re only serious about one thing and that’s not true.” Karin also highlighted her feelings in response to those stereotypes: “Sometimes they think that student-athletes are dumber than regular students. … That’s kind of hard. I have really good grades. I am going to graduate with honors. It’s hard to be pigeon-holed into that student-athlete thing.” As participants shared, being stereotyped is especially hurtful, when it negates the intrapersonal aspects noted earlier. Bob highlighted this fact:

people pinpoint you as an athlete. Even if they don’t know you, they kind of pin you as an athlete, and they don’t really see you as a whole person. … they pin you as an athlete and the first thing they think is wild, or, they don’t think hard working, sometimes I think.

The participants also emphasized how people of authority, such as some teachers and advisors, sometimes negatively appraise them without knowing them, and how hurtful it is to them. As Karin shared:

Sometimes you get a professor who doesn’t like student-athletes or an advisor and if the advisor doesn’t like you. That really sucks. Because they don’t take their
time working on your problems with you. When I applied for graduation, he knew I was an athlete and he really didn’t treat me with the respect he treated the person in front of me who was a non-athlete, who was also a non-traditional student. He was really nice to her and I came in and he kind of threw some stuff on the paper and said okay, you are done and told me how much he hated athletes because they are overpaid.

Nicole also described this:

I guess there are some professors that don’t like student-athletes. Maybe they feel like they just try to fly by, and that has happened to me before. ... people don’t understand my schedule, so maybe if I take a class, and I’m having to miss because we go out of town, they don’t like that and they try to give you a hard time.

Finally, Bob shared a similar view about a teacher:

I didn’t like it at all, because he’d never known me. He did not know how hard I work or how smart I am or if I’m lazy or if I’m anything. He thought I was wanting a grade because I was an athlete. Especially, at that time, I had walked on [the team]; I was an athlete by choice. All that extra work. ... I was like wow! Do all the teachers think low, like I thought student-athletes were held high. That people thought that they were hard working and determined and he thought the opposite of me. He puts student-athletes down here and students up here. My perception is the other way, you know, that student-athletes are the ones that work twice as hard as students, and the teacher thought the opposite. So that was kind of hard for me.
As Bob described this last point, he firmly stated that he believed that “... student-athletes are the ones that work twice as hard as students ...”. This reveals stereotypes that student-athletes have toward others, and more specifically other students. As the participants described those stereotypes throughout this study, they often mentioned them in opposition to how they view themselves; in opposition to their own hard work ethic, internal drive, and commitment. Jenny describes this when she said:

I wouldn’t say that I like, perceive myself as better than them, than regular students. But I just feel like I, I have got, you know, worked harder already for the day [laughter] you know, and had to do more than just wake up and go to school, and then go back to bed.

Often the participants did not clearly specify their stereotypes, but in a round about way, they expressed their beliefs about working harder than other students, and viewing other students as being “lazy slackers”, as Clark shared: “I may be more motivated about life and being better, instead of just sitting down and be nothing.” Likewise, Sarah shared this: “I definitely, I don't ever really converse with non-student-athletes. In very rare occasions. ... I don't, I don't know. ... I can't do this couch potato people.” Finally, Jenny summarized this overall feeling of student-athletes having worked harder than students, when she stated: “I feel like I go through a lot more struggles and hardships sometimes, than like maybe the regular student.”

Restricting and Sacrificing Aspects of Being a Student-Athlete

Student-athletes in this sample depicted the many sacrifices they made, not only to improve themselves as athletes, but also to allow their team to succeed. The participants believed that those restrictions were often present simply when individuals
chose to play their respective sport and make it a collegiate athletic career. Student-athletes described those restrictions as a general lack of time and free will that they experienced throughout their athletic career, and believed it to be at the core of their Student Athlete Worldview. Nicole emphasized this general state and its influence, when she said: “it’s just so demanding to where you just don’t have time for anything else. ... It takes up your whole life, it just consumes you.” Karin also described this general state, as she stated:

Being an athlete requires making sacrifices that otherwise would not be made. For example, during spring break, my team gets one day off. Everyone else who is not an athlete gets the whole week. I have never had a spring break since I have been playing ... (since I was 10). ... I feel as though normies don’t see the sacrifices we make and think we take everything for granted.

Freedom

The participants in this sample described lack of freedom as a major influence they faced in their daily life as collegiate student-athletes, and as being at the core of their Student Athlete Worldview. They also emphasized the many effects they experienced from this lack of freedom. Rachel shared and described the sport’s grasp on the many aspects of her life:

You can’t just take classes anytime. Like, your coach tells you when you are going to practice and you can’t take a class during that time. There is a big party this weekend but you have to go travel with the team. So, it’s kind of like ... when you are in season, your whole life revolves around it. So, you can’t just say “oh, hey I’m going [home] for the weekend and go party with these people that I
have known since I was a kid”. You have to do whatever the rest of the team is doing. You don’t just go off and do your own thing whenever you feel like it.

Rachel also stated:

"Being a student-athlete plays a huge roll in college by the fact that you can not just simply transfer schools whenever you feel like. I have friends that every year they switch schools or go study abroad. When you are an athlete that is not possible. They are many things you have to think about before you just pick up and leave. If you are on scholarship can you find another school that will give you money, or just the fact of adapting to a new team? What happens if you get there and you don’t fit into your style of play, or you went from being a starter to not getting that much playing time. All these things are what athletes take into consideration.

Likewise, lack of social life was explained by the participants as a major influence in their daily life as collegiate student-athletes, and as being at the core of their Student Athlete Worldview. The participants described their lack of social life as having many different facets: a general lack of time to go out, as well as having to stay in shape and therefore miss many parties throughout their college years. Clark shared his thought with few words: “Having no time. For doing the social [thing].” Blondie shared this as a disadvantage: “With going out, I know during my season I do not go out as much so that suffers, since we can’t do it as much. ... You don’t really have a social life, so that’s, maybe that’s a weakness.” Likewise, Bob emphasized his restraint from participating in social life:
Going out, because I don’t get to, definitely not as much. If I’m at a party, I always think about what I have to do tomorrow. I can’t drink too much, because I have to [do my sport], you know, that type of thing.

Bob also described one of his many times when he had to make a choice between his sport and his social life, and the feelings he experienced as he did so:

Last Friday night, my buddy, it was his birthday and we had a big party and I was there for an hour. I couldn’t drink, couldn’t have fun and couldn’t do anything, because I had a meet in the morning, and I had to leave the party early. I mean when I left, I just felt like I was sad driving away. I didn’t want to leave this party, being it was his birthday, I felt like I was leaving a friend behind, just to [do my sport] in the morning. I knew I had to, and I wish I could have stayed the whole time. I couldn’t even stay the whole time, even not drinking. … I had to go home and I missed everything. I had to hear about it on the phone in the morning. That’s not fun. … I felt bad about missing his party, for just [my sport] … Made me feel separated.

In a similar aspect, the student-athletes in this sample emphasized their difficulties in making friends and maintaining friendships, as well as the difficulties involved with relationships, due to the restrictions and sacrifices required in order to pursue their athletic and academic aspirations. Rachel stated: “It’s kind of harder too to keep in touch with your friends that also play [my sport] just because you guys are always traveling and doing stuff. You are on opposite schedules.” Bob also added that it is not only hard to have relationships with friends, but also in romantic relationships:
Relationship wise, when I was [doing my sport], my relationship with my girlfriend at the time, it took a lot of toll. Maybe not on me as much as it did her, because I was used to being up at 5:30 in the morning and then going to practice in the afternoon, also, and going to weights. Going away for competitions for seven days, and I can remember, just because conference is now, and Valentines Day is conference, and she was not happy at all when I told her I was going to be out of town. And because we had been dating almost a year at that time and she wasn’t happy at all about that. That put a lot of extra stress on me. I had to worry about that at conference and that’s not something that I wanted or needed. So that was really tough knowing that she didn’t understand why I was going to conference, and to me conference and Valentine’s Day, you know, I can take you out to dinner when we get back. I’ll buy you lots of roses, I promise. But she … something about that day, she didn’t understand.

Balancing Time

Student-athletes in this sample described balancing their time, between athletics and academics, as well as always being busy and short on time, as being at the core of their Student Athlete Worldview. The participants explained how this lack of time influenced their daily structure and organization, and ultimately influenced the outcome of their athletic and/or academic success in college. Barney emphasized this constant lack of time, due to practices and competition, when he stated:

You are a lot busier, that’s pretty much it, you’re a lot busier. You have to put up with more things. … they [students] have more time to study because they’re not, they don’t spend half their afternoon at practice.
Bob also described his battle with time:

   The time, you know, you’re always pushed for, you know. I wished I had two or three extra hours in a day. Time is just always … It seems like I am always fighting time. That’s the hardest thing. Right now, I’m fighting time at study hall. It is always about time.

   In addition, student-athletes often felt that their schooling should be more important, but that sport often interfered, as Clark emphasized:

   you have 4 hours less everyday of your time to do whatever you want. … the education is the first most important thing in your life, and you have to put the most effort on it. But then again you have [my sport] and you have to keep playing. … … Grades, they are the most affected by it.

   Clark also highlighted the difficulties in choosing his battles, when he added:

   As a student-athlete, it is more difficult to spend more time only in one assignment as my time is constricted due to … practice and fitness workouts, I have to stay up later, I haven’t been sleeping before 2 am everyday for the last weeks. For another class, I had the 3rd tests last Friday, and I only got to sleep for 49 minutes that morning.

   Finally, participants also emphasized the difficulties in missing classes due to their sport.

   Karin declared:

   When you miss class, it is really hard for you to make up that time that you missed. Especially if it’s like a three credit class that you only have once a week. You miss that one time and you’ve missed the whole week of stuff. That’s hard to make up. You know you can’t say, oh coach I’m not coming to the game today
because I’m going to go to class. You could, but it will not go over very well. It’s hard to make up. It’s hard to kind of peddle a little bit faster to catch up with everybody because you missed it that week. … That’s hard.

In addition to balancing their time, between athletics and academics, as well as always being busy and short on time, the participating student-athletes expressed having to balance the ever present expectations set upon them as they started their collegiate career: academic and athletic success, which often dictated their day to day actions. Student-athletes in this sample described expectations, and the daily pressures and sacrifices connected with those, as being at the core of their Student Athlete Worldview. Furthermore, the participants called attention to the fact that those expectations came from both fronts of their identity: academic and athletic. Nicole highlighted this by stating:

right now our coaches, they definitely have to push school, because you have to remain eligible, you have to get a certain GPA anyway. … [but] you can tell they still want [your sport] to pretty much be the first priority.

Likewise, Jenny described the incredible amount of pressure generated from the expectations in her student and athlete life, when she said:

I need to stay eligible with classes, you know, have to have good grades, have to make sure that I'm not having my classes conflict with [my sport], and that I'm getting enough sleep, you know. It's always a challenge, I've been doing homework before and I've been trying to stay up and work on homework, and I'm like “just a couple more problems, but I'm like it’s so late I got to get to bed, or otherwise I'm going to be too tired for tomorrow”. So then, a lot of times [my
sport] will come before school, sometimes, for me. You know, I'll be like "I have to go to bed now" I'll work on this after practice really quick. You know, so then [my sport] comes first kind of.

Sarah also highlighted expectations of athletic success as being ever present throughout the collegiate career, when she said:

Coach says you know, maybe Sarah she'll win this, and the assistant coach is like maybe Sarah she'll win this. And I'm like, "oh no" I'm just like “oh, gosh”, ok I got to get a ..., and I just felt too much ... expectations.

Blondie described a similar experience, stating: “Yes, pressure. Yeah, that pressure, and then, and then if you do go to the tournament, your coaches know what you are capable of, that pressure of accomplishing that.” Clark also commented that athletic pressure is always high: “at a certain point, people expect to see certain results from you all the time”, while academics are often moved to the back burner:

I usually end up putting more time into [my sport]. Then as much as possible, usually if you have a little bit of time, rush into things, you may not have as much time into school. But when test comes, you try to maybe not go to practice one day and study and ... you get less study time, that’s the thing.

In addition to external expectations and the daily pressures and sacrifices connected with those, Jenny described her personal athletic expectations as a source of stress: “I spend a lot of time thinking about [my sport], and “what if I do, if I do this, how am I going to perform tomorrow?” you know. “If I do this what's going to happen tomorrow when I play ... ?” Blondie also spoke of similar personal expectations:
That's really hard to bounce, to have expectations, but not to put too much pressure on yourself for them. ... I have expectations and pressures on myself, I'm trying, I'm trying not to put so much pressure on myself, because it, it really doesn't help anything, except stress you out.

At last, Barney described the difficult demands of balancing time between academics and athletics, by offering an oversimplified solution to deal with them: “Do all the study hall hours, just do everything you are supposed to do. Stay eligible and get good grades, and that way you don’t have any conflicts between any of the two.”

_Self Care_

The participating student-athletes described self care practices, such as: eating healthy, drinking alcohol moderately, not getting sick or breaking a limb, being rested and protecting their body in general, as being part of daily sacrifices made to try to positively influence the outcome of their athletic and academic success in college. The student-athletes also explained the many effects they experienced from those sacrifices and restrictions, and how important they were to their Student Athlete Worldview. Karin described the sacrifices she performed:

I don’t eat out. I think that’s a lot of saturated fat. I work so hard every day to stay in shape that I’m not going to do something that is going to ruin all that. I don’t go out. I’m too tired at the end of the day to go out. Drinking is not okay. That’s so many empty calories. What are you doing with that? It’s going to take so long to burn it off.

She also added: “It probably influences everything, when you think about it.”
Nicole also described similar behaviors and sacrifices for her sport: “I go out now, but you just have to keep it to a minimum and try to protect your body as well as you can. You don’t want to get sick and wear yourself down too much.” Likewise, Clark believed sacrifices for his sport are important, and explained it slightly differently:

In the movie “peaceful warrior”, the athlete is being told by this person Socrates, that he has to lay everything out, you know, the women, you know, everything, alcohol, you know everything. ... he had to go to school, he had to work on his athletics, and leave some of the social life out there, and focus on his athletic goals to win the gold medal.

Finally, Bob depicted the bits and pieces he often misses in life, as he concentrates on athletics:

With [my sport], I have to always a certain time where I am ... working out. If something is going on during that time, I always miss out on that little bit. Being: doctor’s appointment, going to get groceries, hanging out with friends, going to the beach, surfing, I miss

While the self care practices mentioned above were important in the student-athletes’ life, the participants described being rested as the hardest one to accomplish, and as the one that influenced their life a great deal. The participating student-athletes described being tired as being at the core of their Student Athlete Worldview. They laid emphasis on being tired as a major constant in their athletic college life, which often lead to extreme strain day in and day out. Rachel shared this in a humorous way:

You are busy, and you're always tired. Like, a lot of times everybody goes out, and your friends that don’t play sport, like, they don’t understand, like why are

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you so tired. ... I think that’s part of being a student-athlete. ... you’re just always
tired. If I have too much energy, I start to get scared. [laughter].

Barney also described his struggles with fatigue influencing his academic life:

Being tired is probably ... the hardest thing that I have to deal with. Because, like
after morning practice, I always have to schedule afternoon classes, because [after
practice] I have to go back and sleep. Because, I remember my freshmen year, I
took classes right after practice in the morning, and I’d just be falling asleep in
them, so, I can’t do that anymore.

Likewise Blondie stated the futile and constant search for rest: “… being tired, it’s like,
it’s something you’re constantly gonna fight, but you’re not gonna win. Unless you go to
bed at 8 o’clock at night for like a fricking month [laughter], which isn’t gonna happen.”

Athletes also described how their fatigue often interfered with their social
activities, as well as wanting to relax and spend time alone, as Jenny stated:

I think that's a problem for me, … sometimes making time for others, because,
you know, I come home from [my sport] and come home from school and just
want to relax by myself for a while. So then I don't really make time for other
people, even other friends. I mean, a lot of times the only person I hang out with
is my roommate, because she's right there, you know [laughter]. I don't have to
call anybody up, because I'm, I'm honestly just tired, you know. The days, the
days are hard and long sometimes, and I don't really, I know I don't make the
effort sometimes also. But, sometimes I'm just too tired to be like "hey, you want
to come over" to anyone, you know. It's just much easier for me to kind of be
antisocial. So I think that's a struggle that I go through.
Finally, student-athletes stated that their level of fatigue is often so high, that it often shapes their schedule, and consequently that when a moment of calm comes, their wish is just to do nothing. Blondie highlighted this:

I must say, when I have a day off, I want to do nothing. If I finally have a day where I can, I’ve practiced enough and where I don’t need to practice another day, I don’t have to work, then I want to do absolutely nothing. ... When I do have my days off, I just, you know, want to relax at home.

Barney also expressed how being tired influenced his life activities: “I look forward to Saturday, after the morning practice, and you have like 2 days off to do whatever you want, ... I’m a big fan of sleeping. ... Every second I have off, I’m sleeping, pretty much.”

Chapter Summary

Student-athletes in this sample reflected on their past and present, and how they view themselves as athletes, and more specifically as student-athletes, in order to offer a descriptive picture about their view of the world, and therefore described and illustrated the way student-athletes perceive and experience themselves and the world through their athletic experiences; or Student Athlete Worldview. This was established by identifying the common themes that appeared across the participants’ stories, which were depicted by the core ideas and the important elements that emerged during the analysis of the interviews and journals, and were present in the majority of narratives. The common and emerging themes experienced, identified and described by the student-athletes consisted of three distinctive section: (1) the intrapersonal aspects of being a student-athlete, (2) the
interpersonal aspects of being a student-athlete, and (3) the sacrificing and restricting aspects of being a student-athlete.

The first section of this chapter identified the intrapersonal aspects of being a student-athlete; or the experiences recognized by student-athletes as occurring within themselves. Student-athletes in this sample depicted the many positive inner qualities they possessed and came to cherish throughout their athletic years, as being at the core of who they were today, not only as athletes, but also as students and human beings. The participants believed these dispositions were as much a part of who they became as student-athletes, as the practical skills their coaches taught them throughout the years. The core ideas and the important elements encompassed (a) work ethic: discipline, determination, dedication, having heart, (b) internal drive: competitive drive, love of competition, having ambition and motivation toward improvement, being goal oriented, (c) self knowledge: self confidence and consequently knowing themselves, being able to adapt and having great attitudes, being responsible for their own actions, and (d) commitment: love for sport, love and hate relation, influence on life in general, and were depicted by the participating student-athletes as fundamental to their core beliefs.

The second section of this chapter identified the interpersonal aspects of being a student-athlete; or the experiences recognized by student-athletes involving relations between themselves and others around them. Student-athletes in this sample depicted the many positive aspects and benefits they experienced and enjoyed, and came to make their own throughout their athletic years, as being essential and important to who they were today. The core ideas and the important elements encompassed (a) being apart: being unique, being special, part of elite group, desire to stand out, (b) sense of connection to
athletes: belonging, common grounds and goals, camaraderie, lasting bonds, deep sense of understanding, support and encouragement, (c) benefits and assets: privileges, resources, services, travel, scholarships, structure, organization, planning, and (d) stereotypes: being stereotypes by students, teachers, advisors, stereotype students, and were depicted by the participating student-athletes as being a strong part of their Student Athlete Worldview.

The third and last section of this chapter identified the sacrificing and restricting aspects of being a student-athlete; or the pressures and sacrifices that student-athletes perceive as ever present in their life. Student-athletes described those restrictions as a general lack of time and free will that they experienced throughout their athletic career, and believed it to be at the core of their Student Athlete Worldview. The core ideas and the important elements encompassed (a) freedom: lack of freedom, lack of social life, lack of time to go out, difficulties in making friends, difficulties in maintaining friendships, difficulties in maintaining romantic relationships, (b) balancing time: between athletics and academics, always being busy, lack of time, academic and athletic expectations, pressures, sacrifices, personal athletic expectations, and (c) self care: eating healthy, drinking alcohol moderately, not getting sick, not breaking a limb, being rested, protecting their body, fatigued, and were depicted by the participating student-athletes as being deep-seated into their way of being.
CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The goal of this study was to learn about student-athletes' view of the world; to explore and describe the way they perceive and experience themselves and the world as a result of their athletic experiences. Therefore, this study intended to discover the central and essential facets of Student Athlete Worldview (SAWV). This chapter will bring together and integrate the common themes that appeared and were present across the participants' stories, which were depicted by the core ideas and important elements that emerged during the analysis of the data. More significantly, it will provide the reader an overview of the common themes to demonstrate the importance of the study, in order to offer a more complete and better understanding of the fundamental essence of Athletic Identity, or Student Athlete Worldview.

Framework of the Discussion

This conclusion chapter will be divided into four different sections aimed at summarizing and clarifying the meaning and significance of conducting a phenomenological inquiry about Student Athlete Worldview. The first section will summarize the narratives of the nine participants, with the intention of revealing and presenting a holistic story about student-athletes' perception and experiences of themselves and the world around them, as a result of their athletic experiences. The
Second section will look at selected core findings, in regards to their contribution to the literature related to student-athletes, Athletic Identity, and Student Athlete Worldview. The third section will look more specifically at the direct implications of this study, for counseling practice as well as future research. Finally, the fourth and last section summarizes some of the limitations of this study, and makes recommendations for changes that could be made in future studies of this kind.

**Student-Athlete’s “Story”**

Student-athletes offered a descriptive and revealing picture about the way they perceive and experience themselves and the world through their athletic experiences. They described intrapersonal, interpersonal as well as restrictive and sacrificing aspects of being a student-athlete, which have considerable overlap in this narrative. Student-athletes depicted the core ideas and fundamental qualities they possess as being: hard workers, determined, dedicated, having drive, competitive, motivated, as well as having heart, will to improve, and love of sport. They described how those qualities made them feel: apart, better, elite, knowledgeable about self, able to adapt, and responsible; which in turn guided their Student Athlete Worldview toward positive experiences of being special and unique, and thus confident in themselves. They also described how those fundamental qualities sometimes created hardships and negative feelings including: lack of freedom, lack of social life, as well as lack of time, and difficulty balancing academics and athletics; which in turn guided their Student Athlete Worldview toward negative experiences of missing out and feeling restricted, and thus generally separated from others, as well as being stressed and busy, and thus generally tired.

More importantly, participants expressed and described what they believe is their
true self, as student-athletes. They declared loving their sport more than anything, and expressed an amazing sense of confidence and resilience in themselves, as a result of their lifelong athletic pursuit. At the core of who they are, the participants declared feeling a sense of being special and unique, which they stated, comes from their incredible daily determination and dedication, as well as drive to work hard and better themselves, not only in their sport but also in their academic goals. The student-athletes described and explained those aspects as being dependent upon each other and closely complementing each other. The participants were almost at a lack of words when they tried to explain that all those aspects of themselves are just not possible without “that thing” or more specifically “that extra thing inside you”, which they called “Heart”. They stated that without Heart, it would be impossible to continue their pursuit. That without Heart, even having drive and being competitive would not matter, it just would not be enough.

The participants spoke of the aspects described above, as central and fundamental to who they are as student-athletes, and as prerequisites to the many positive and few negative factors that they perceive and experience as a result of their athletic pursuit. The following quote nicely captures the participants’ fundamental sense of ability, that leads them toward numerous positive factors in their lives, as well as continuously reinforcing their love of sport, hard work, determination, dedication, drive, will to improve and heart: “I feel that [my sport] has given me the confidence I need, to know I will succeed when I know that I have put time, effort and focus into whatever I do”.

Below is a pictorial representation to help visualize and summarize the overview of the Student-Athlete’s “Story”, as well as a more in depth description of the student-
athletes’ perception and experience of themselves and the world through their athletic experiences:

Figure 3. Pictorial Representation of Student Athlete Worldview.

Hard work, hard work, hard work! Those are the words that student-athletes used many times over when talking about how they see themselves and what it means for them.
to be a student-athlete. They identified hard work as being an essential part of who they are. They believed that hard work not only defines them, but also leads them into their daily struggles and aspirations. However, student-athletes also believed that hard work alone is just not enough and that determination and dedication has to be a part of who they are, if they want to be both a student and an athlete. Some of them explained this as having heart, or more precisely having that thing inside of you, that thing that just makes you want to keep working and keep going no matter what.

Student-athletes went as far as saying that without heart it really would not matter. It would not matter how competitive and motivated you are, or how much drive you have, because without heart you would not push yourself that extra mile, that extra set, that extra throw; without heart you just would not be able to bring yourself to the limit. They explained that having heart allowed them to keep working when it is hard, to keep waking up when they are tired, to keep trying when they feel defeated, and to keep wanting “it” when “it” eludes them. Student-athletes with heart just will not stop trying, they will not let go, whatever their sight is on. They even described that having heart is a big difference that they have with people who do not participate in sport like they do.

Student-athletes explained that the foundations; or even pre-requisites, as they stated, of being a student-athlete are hard work, determination, and dedication, connected with having heart. However, they also added that while those are extremely important in making them who they are and what they do, they often are just not enough. They explained that having drive and being competitive are also incredibly important factors and fundamental aspects of who they are as student-athletes. Student-athletes explained
and recognized being competitive in everything they did, from being the best in their sport to being the best at tying their shoes.

While those characteristics were described by student-athletes as being at the heart of who they are, they also added, that they could not continue day in and day out to be competitive and have drive, and therefore be who they are, without an incredible will to improve. Student-athletes depicted the idea of improvement and having the will to improve as something that defines their every move, as something that leads them daily. They believe that improving is always present in their daily struggles and especially their aspirations. Student-athletes considered this to the point that there is always, and they mean always, something to improve.

Student-athletes described their competitive drive to always get better and their determined and dedicated hard work ethic as being at the heart of their Student Athlete Worldview. The participants presented these as being the core ideas and the essence of who they are as student-athletes. However, they also specified that those factors are so hard to repeat, day in and day out, that without an extreme and immense love of their sport, their years as athletes before college, and as collegiate athletes would not be possible. Student-athletes recognized that without that love, the hardships, and even sometimes the hate they have for their sport, would be too much for them to bear.

Student-athletes further expressed that living from this dedicated and driven place set them apart from others. They experienced themselves as better, stronger, and more important than somebody who is not a college athlete. They also declared feeling as a part of something bigger and better, as a part of something that not everybody can be a part of, and that this makes them extremely proud and happy. Student-athletes explained
that this feeling of being apart and special feels like a reward for all the hard work done, all the efforts produced, and all the hours they have relentlessly poured into their sport. Student-athletes believed that being apart and being better, is a very important part of who they are and of who they continuously try to be.

Student-athletes expressed that desire to be special and unique as a self-perpetuating cycle. As student-athletes they stand out, they are more recognized; they are special and unique, and it makes them feel good. Deep inside, student-athletes know what they did or did not do to achieve their specific goals, to improve enough to be on top, to become one of the few; to be unique and special. They know themselves in and out. They know their strength and their weaknesses, and most importantly how to adapt and work on them in order to improve. Student-athletes know their own role in not reaching their goals and realize that not working hard enough at any given moment in time might impact them later. They acknowledged that knowing themselves, and knowing that they worked as hard as they did to be where they are today, makes them feel great; it makes them feel confident. The participants recognized that knowing their skills, and their limits is a tremendous aspect of who they are and what defines them, and is an incredible tool to increase their self-confidence.

Student-athletes identified the benefits and privileges that they receive due to their athletic status as external and tangible recognition of being special and unique, which in turn promoted an increase in their sense of confidence. In particular, student-athletes identified the scholarships they receive and the travels they accomplish as assets that are unique to them, and that make them special. Therefore, they explained their sense of pride in being part of that top percentage, as well as being better and part of something
special. They also described the infrastructure, of doctors, trainers, tutors, and other services offered and surrounding student-athletes, as setting them apart from other college students. In addition, they also recognized that the many resources and services, that only student-athletes receive, made their life much easier and less stressful than what it could be, over their years in college. They viewed that not only as a great help, but also as a privilege of their athletic status.

Finally, another aspect of their life, closely connected to who they are, is their connection with fellow student-athletes. They identified this as making their life much easier and less stressful over their years in college. They explained it as an instant family that they have as they arrive on campus; which accompanies them for four years and beyond, and gives them a sense of support, encouragement and belonging. They also recognized that other student-athletes are able to offer them so much more than just a casual relationship, because they truly and deeply understand them. Student-athletes identified other student-athletes as closely connected to them, because of their deep sense of understanding of the experiences, feelings, pains, hurdles, and successes that accompany them throughout their collegiate athletic journey. Student-athletes give them a special and unique family to which they belong, and in which they are understood and accepted.

Participants recognized the fact that: hard work, determination, dedication, motivation, heart, drive, competition, will to improve, love of sport, being apart, better, stronger, important, knowing oneself, adapting, having goals, being unique, special, confident, having benefits, privileges, scholarships, travels, infrastructure, services of doctors, trainers, tutors, connection with fellow student-athletes, support, encouragement,
sense of belonging, and understanding; is a very strong part of who they have become and who they are as human beings, in all the interactions they have in their daily lives with people around them, and with obstacles and hurdles life gives them. They also identified those aspects of who they are, as positive aspects of their athletic experiences. Although student-athletes described those positive aspects as occurring much more often than the negative aspects of their athletic experiences, they did acknowledge some challenges associated with being a student-athlete.

Busy, busy, busy! Those are the words that the participants used many times over when talking about how their athletic experience negatively affects them in their daily lives. Student-athletes identified lack of time, as the biggest hurdle they face as students and athletes in college. They often wished they had extra time, everyday, to either do their school work or to rest. Student-athletes described having to continually balance their time, between athletics and academics. They emphasized that this lack of time influenced their daily structure and organization, and ultimately influenced the outcomes of their athletic and/or academic success. Student-athletes described this as being especially true, due to the ever present expectations set upon them as they started college, which often determined how much time could be spent on different activities. Student-athletes recognized that both their student and their athlete status should be valued, and a similar amount of time and effort should be spent on both, but they agreed that this does not usually happen. They identified that their sport is often put first, to the detriment of academics.

Another consequence of being busy is the lack of social life that ensues. Student-athletes considered their social life, with friends, or lovers, as reduced to a minimum,
especially during their season. They described this as the first thing that goes away, in order to keep up with athletics and academics. Student-athletes also identified how hard this is, not only on them, but also on their friends and their loved ones. They found this to be especially true when those people are not student-athletes themselves, and have therefore a very hard time understanding why so little time is devoted to their relationship. For student-athletes, while the choice is not always the one they want, they do understand that they need to make it, in order to give their all to athletics.

Finally, student-athletes described their lack of going out, general lack of freedom, lack of choices and spontaneity, as well as lack of fully living the college experience as a necessary sacrifice for self-care. They reported always having to think of their sport first, before making any major or even minor decisions. Examples of significant limits to their academic experience included having to choose classes to fit their practice and game schedules, not being able to study abroad, or to change schools part way through their college years. Examples of daily self care practices that limited social/nonacademic aspects of the college experience included needing to eat healthy, drink alcohol in moderation if at all, avoid getting sick or breaking a limb, and focus on getting rest and protecting their body in general. Those constant restrictions are an important part of the student-athletes daily life and activities, leading them to feel that they are missing out and therefore feeling separated from other college students.

While lack of time, and therefore being tired and feeling separated is an important aspect of their life, and is closely connected to who they are and what they do, student-athletes considered the positive aspects that their sport brings them to be decisive in their will to continue their sport. Student-athletes identified feeling special and unique, and
therefore confident as an incredible boost to their life, and who they are. They believe that a hard work ethic, determination, dedication, heart, drive, competition, willingness to improve, as well as knowing themselves and being apart, is paramount in their identity as student-athletes. Nonetheless, they do recognize that all those aspects, positives and negatives, represent the way they perceive and experience the world through their athletic experiences; those aspects represent their Student Athlete Worldview.

Importance and Contributions of the Study

This section examines selected core findings, in regards to their contribution to the literature related to student-athletes, Athletic Identity, and Student Athlete Worldview. In other words, given the results that the nine participants shared about their experiences as student-athletes, this section looks at how the literature review is connected to the research question guiding this study, which is: How do student-athletes perceive and experience themselves and the world as a result of their athletic experiences; or what is Student Athlete Worldview? These connections should, in turn, allow college counselors to be more effective in counseling student-athletes, as well as enable researchers to conduct further studies related to student-athletes’ Athletic Identity, Worldview and counseling.

Focus on Description of SAWV Rather Than Only on Level of AI

The major contribution of this study is that it expands the knowledge that we have on student-athletes and helps fill some of the gaps in the literature. Past literature (Brewer et al., 1993; Eldridge, 1983) carefully and appropriately introduced a way to identify variation in student-athletes’ level of commitment to their role as athletes. The concept of
Athletic Identity and development of the AIIMS facilitated understanding of “the strength and the exclusivity of an individual’s identification with the athlete role” (Brewer et al., 1993, p. 242). Missing from this understanding, however, is a more complete description of student-athletes, particularly “… their identities and value systems and what sport and competition means to them in their lives …” (Balague, 1999, p. 89).

Therefore, this study’s major contribution lies in the fact that I intended to start to understand the identity of student-athletes, in a more descriptive way, and therefore explore the essence of that identity, by uncovering and describing the attitudes, behaviors, values, and skills that student-athletes may have in common. Student-athletes identified positive and negative aspects representing the way they perceive and experience the world through their athletic experiences; representing their Student Athlete Worldview. They described those positive aspects as being: a hard work ethic, determination, dedication, heart, drive, competition, willingness to improve, as well as knowing themselves and being apart, and therefore feeling unique, special and confident. While they described those negative aspects as being: lack of time, difficulty balancing athletics and academics, expectations, lack of social life, as well as restrictions and stereotypes, and therefore feeling busy, missing out, separated and tired. Student-athletes identified both positive and negative aspects, to be closely connected to who they are and what they do, and therefore as being paramount in their identity as student-athletes. They especially identified feeling special and unique, and therefore confident as an incredible boost to who they are, to their student-athlete life, and they believed that to be a constant aspect of self that drives their athletic pursuit.
Focus on Student and Athlete Rather Than Only on Athlete

A second contribution of this study is that it furthers the understanding that we have of student-athletes and helps reduce some of the misconceptions that we may have of these collegiate athletes. Past literature (Chartrand & Lent, 1987) described student-athletes as being extremely focused on the athletic portion of their life. That literature described them as having a distinct view of the world, as well as different ways to deal with issues and problems they may face, than other college students may have. Scholars believe that these differences in perceiving and experiencing the world are based on the high levels of commitment that many student-athletes bestow to their sport, as well as the way they seem to strongly identify with their athletic role or identity (Brewer et al., 1993; Eldridge, 1983).

Developmentalists such as Erickson (1980) and Chickering (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) believe that the identity formation occurring during the college years is normally a period of identity exploration. However, scholars believe that while exploring many new roles and identities, in a flexible manner, is not only normal but necessary for development, often student-athletes lack that required flexibility. In a slightly different manner, the socialization perspective looks at the development of identity as a balance that individuals have to attain between their personal and social identity. However, again, scholars believe that for student-athletes this balance is often hard to attain, because of the fact that our current society seems to lead young athletes away from recreational sport, and toward competitive sport; or winning above all mentality. This in turn, leads them to pursue extrinsic, rather than intrinsic rewards, which society continues to provide. Therefore, leaving student-athletes at the college level to yearn for a strong
focus on their sport and a high level of Athletic Identity, in order to achieve the goal that society has "told" them to achieve.

Finally, social role theorists also believe that a balance is necessary between roles, but scholars believed and hypothesized that, student-athletes often gravitate, consciously or not, towards a stronger Athletic Identity as they sense its necessity to increase sport performance and attain their goals of playing at the highest level. To these athletes, everything outside their athletic plan that may lead them away from their dream is dismissed (Young & Bursik, 2000). Therefore, a vicious circle can ensue, such that the higher the level of Athletic Identity, the less likely that individual is to explore areas outside of sport (Brewer et al., 1993; Kornspan & Etzel, 2001). Scholars believe that this lack of exploration increases the chances of identity foreclosure, which means that "the individual completely commits to a role without engaging in exploratory behavior" (Marcia, et al., 1993, p. 25).

However, throughout the interviews, journals and follow-up interviews, I have not heard student-athletes talk in such ways, either explicitly implicitly. While student-athletes described themselves as being extremely focused on the athletic portion of their life, they also stated that academics have been a priority during their college years. The participants also clearly emphasized that while personal and social identity balance is often hard to attain because of constant lack of time and stress, they often try to achieve as much of a social life as they can afford. In addition, the participants stated that their sense of balance with being social and connecting is more than often met by their sense of belonging and understanding from other student-athletes and teammates. They also suggested that while they may be less likely to explore areas outside of sport, they are
receiving incredible support and understanding within this group to give them a positive feeling about their life as student-athletes.

Therefore, it is important to remember that throughout this study, the participants continuously referred to themselves as students and as athletes. When they discussed hard work, being a hard worker in academics as well as being smart, was a source of pride. When they discussed priorities, they always had in mind that school is as, if not more, important than athletics, even if they stated that sometimes the coaches may think otherwise. It is therefore, important to understand them and address them as students and as athletes. It is therefore imperative to remember that while everything stated in the pictorial representation comes through their view, that everything comes through their student-athlete view, not only their athletic view.

Finally, it would also be important to note that student-athletes may not only see themselves as students and athletes, but also as people. As theorists such as Erickson (1980) and Chickering (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) proposed, a balance between three areas of one’s life: academic, athletic and personal, is important to individual’s well being. In this study, the participants repeatedly mentioned being as much students as athletes, but they also periodically stated that relaxing, having free time, and doing their own thing was important to them as well. Therefore, future college counselors should always try to maintain the understanding that those three roles seem as important to student-athletes.

Focus on Positives and Negatives Rather Than Only on Negatives

A third contribution of this study is that it further helps reduce some of the misconceptions that we may have of collegiate athletes. Past literature has indicated that
student-athletes with a strong Athletic Identity are usually amongst the best in their sport, while also being the most vulnerable to emotional disturbance (Stankovich et al., 2001). Researchers believe this to be due to the fact that the Athletic Identity is incorporated into an athlete's self-concept, or the perception that he/she has of self, in terms of personal worth and competence (Balague, 1999; Brewer et al., 1993; Brown et al., 2000; Kornspan & Etzel, 2001). As stated earlier, scholars believe that this process starts in childhood, and may result in the development of attitudes, behaviors, values, and skills common to student-athletes (Parham, 1993), while also impeding the natural process of role exploration and consequently broader identity formation. While the process involved in the formation of Athletic Identity is believed by the sport scientist community to carry both positive and negative consequences for the collegiate student-athlete (Miller & Kerr, 2003; Brown & Hartley, 1998; Rotella & Newburg, 1989), throughout the years, they have emphasized negative consequences much more often than positive ones.

Scholars seemed to suggest that those positive benefits included: a salient self-identity or sense of self, enhanced athletic performance and commitment, increased exercise participation, increased self-esteem, and increased social interactions (with other student-athletes). As for negative consequences, scholars seemed to agree that the major negative consequence is over-commitment to the athletic role, which in turn is believed to lead to a restriction in development of other aspects of self, lack of exploration outside of sport, and an increased chance for identity foreclosure. This is further believed to lead the student-athlete to: career immaturity, poor adjustments when retiring or in the eventuality of a career-ending injury, and psychological problems, such as: poorer health, more social isolation, substance abuse, depression and lower self-esteem (Brewer et al., 1993;
Hale et al. 1999; Horton & Mack, 2000; Martin et al., 1997; Miller & Kerr, 2003; Sparkes, 1998). Parham (1993) also described negative consequences and difficulties as:

Learning to balance academic and athletic pursuits, adapting to a certain degree of isolation from social and more “mainstream” activities, managing success or lack thereof, attending to their own physical health in a more deliberate way so as to minimize injury and subsequent rehabilitation, satisfying multiple relationships, including those having to do with coaches, parents, friends, and community, and terminating an athletic career and finding other activities in which participation will bring about a very similar, if not a more heightened level of satisfaction (p. 412).

As anyone can notice, scholars suggested an incredible amount of negative factors that student-athletes have to face every day, in comparison to the positive factors. While several of those factors were mentioned by the nine participants in this study, it is very important to point out that the participants believed their student-athlete life to be paved with many more positives than negatives. They also described those positive experiences as central to who they are, and how they far overshadow the few restrictions and limitations they acknowledged and face in their daily lives. They described their overwhelmingly positive experiences as being: a hard work ethic, determination, dedication, heart, drive, willingness to improve, as well as knowing themselves and being apart. They identified feeling special and unique, and therefore confident as an incredible boost to who they are, to their student-athlete life, and they believed that to be a constant aspect of their self that drives their athletic pursuit. Therefore, the participants stated that for them all those positives and their love for their sport continuously contributed to their
well being, much more than any negative factors. Below is a pictorial representation to help visualize the amount of positive versus negative factors:

Figure 4. Pictorial Representation of Student Athlete Worldview.

Therefore, future college counselors would be wise to understand and remember that student-athletes identified more positive than negative aspects representing the way
they perceive and experience the world through their athletic experiences. This can be used in counseling sessions, not only to connect more easily with the student-athlete, but also by empowering the student-athlete/client by affirming their feelings of self-sufficiency and confidence. By accepting the fact that student-athletes identified more positives than negatives, college counselors may allow themselves to concentrate on the specific issues brought up by their client, rather than looking at their athletic side as the main source of the problems. In addition, it would also be useful for scholars and researchers to develop and conduct further research also based on those basic positive postulations, in order to contribute to more comprehensive understanding of the student-athlete experience.

_Counseling as Part of Student-Athletes' Infrastructure_

A final contribution of this study is that it continued to emphasize the extreme demand of time that student-athletes have day in and day out. Throughout this study, the nine participants continuously stated that while they did not experience many negative feelings and aspects due to their athletic life, the one they experienced the most was lack of time. Therefore, as college counselors it has become increasingly clearer that it is extremely important to be able to offer immediate help to the student-athletes. In addition, it would also be beneficial to them, to be a part of the athletic structure.

As a college counselor, my goal would be to be a liaison between the university counseling center and the athletic department, by floating from one location to the other. As the student-athletes mentioned, the many resources and services, that they received, made their life much easier and less stressful than what it could be, over their years in college. They viewed that not only as a great help, but also as a privilege of their athletic
status. They especially declared that the ease of access, and the benefit and stress reduction to have those services being a part of the athletic infrastructure, was a big plus for them. So, I would try to have an office in or close to the athletic offices, while at the same time being careful to maintain appropriate confidentiality by not being too close to the athletic department. I would clearly state the rules of confidentiality on my door, in order to appease any fear they may have.

The participants also acknowledged the fact that their schedule was often hard to keep and mesh with day to day appointments and errands that they needed to do. Therefore, I would try to keep that in mind and have as diverse a schedule as I could, with early morning hours, evenings and week-ends. I would also make sure to have an open door policy, and flexible times for the student-athletes to drop in and talk. In addition, I would push student-athletes to let me know how long they would want to meet together, letting go of the traditional 50 minute appointment in favor of 15, 30, or 45 minute appointments more compatible with student-athlete schedules.

Finally, I would intentionally focus on building good rapport and trusting relationships with student-athletes, as Balague (1999) and other scholars believe this to be fundamental. I would do so, by taking and following the steps stated below. Petitpas et al. (1999) described the broad importance of “being good listeners who were able to build rapport with individual athletes and care about what happened to them” (p. 346). However, they also added that the psychologist should be knowledgeable and have person-specific input to bring to the session, as well as putting the needs of the student-athlete before those of the coach, the team and/or the athletic department (Petitpas et al., 1999). This last idea is developed further by Petitpas et al. (1996) when they write that
they believe that college counselors who want to work with student-athletes need to enhance their skills and sensitivity by:

(1) attending practices and competitions, (2) learning the language and rules of the sport, (3) becoming knowledgeable about the sport culture (e.g. social interactions, player/coach relationships), and (4) acknowledging athletes’ strong self-investment in sport (p.62).

I would also make sure that not only student-athletes, but also the coaches, tutors, and the AD would be aware of the availability and potential usefulness of counseling for student-athletes. This would therefore involve nurturing relationships beyond counseling relationships for student-athletes, and with all branches of the athletic department.

Implications of the Study

The implications section of this study will be presented twofold, by offering suggestions for the counseling process as well as for future research. The counseling implications will recognize three different and important topics: (1) self-awareness and multicultural competencies, from the counselor’s side, as an important tool to help student-athletes, (2) understanding and appreciation of the four sides of student-athletes: intrapersonal, interpersonal, positives and negatives, and finally (3) the importance of counselors to really incorporate SAWV into understanding their clients’ core ideas. The research implications will recognize three important topics for future studies: (1) use the holistic aspect of SAWV presented in the pictorial representation as a place to start, (2) test specific counseling interventions, based on current results, to show validity, and finally (3) study a subgroup of athletes that may be having particular and specific difficulties.
Implications for Counseling

Counseling psychologists have focused their attention on better understanding their client’s and their own worldview, in an attempt to become more effective with multicultural counseling. Consequently, individuals with differences from the dominant cultures can benefit from counseling psychologists’ understanding and use of those individuals’ worldview (Arredondo, 1999; Richardson & Molinaro, 1996). This study has offered an initial description of Student Athlete Worldview, and therefore should be useful in helping college counselors consider the many facets of student-athletes daily lives. However, it is often not enough for the counselor to know and understand the client’s worldview, it is also important to understand oneself, and one’s own worldview, in order to be helpful in the counseling process. The significance of self-awareness and multicultural competencies as a tool in helping clients, and especially student-athletes in counseling is extremely important.

In the last decades, this awareness has been emphasized in the multicultural literature (Arredondo, 1999), as Sue and Sue (1990) stated “World views are not only composed of our attitudes, values, opinions, and concepts, but also they may affect how we think, make decisions, behave, and define events” (p. 137). In other words, an individual’s worldview, being the client or the counselor, is the framework from which he/she responds to the world. It is therefore extremely important to not only understand the Student Athlete Worldview, but also to increase college counselors’ self-awareness.

This study has started to unravel the core ideas and elements of Student Athlete Worldview, and as such it has started to present a multifaceted view of student-athletes. Past literature on student-athletes, and especially Athletic Identity, has clearly identified
them as one sided, and leaning toward extremes such as having many negative experiences and struggles. The literature has also tended to mainly focus on their athletics, rather than seeing student-athletes as much as students as they are athletes (Brewer et al., 1993; Hale et al. 1999; Horton & Mack, 2000; Martin et al., 1997; Miller & Kerr, 2003; Sparkes, 1998). It is therefore important for college counselors to understand and appreciate all four aspects of the pictorial representation that grew out of the data in this study: intrapersonal aspects, interpersonal aspects, positives and negatives. It is also important for college counselors to recognize that while researchers have so often focused on negatives, the student-athletes themselves identified the positives aspects of their lives as much more important than the negatives will ever be.

Finally, while it is important for college counselors to appreciate all four aspects of student-athletes: intrapersonal aspects, interpersonal aspects, positives and negatives; it is even more imperative to have a deep sense of understanding of all the different elements of Student Athlete Worldview. As the literature has stated, in order for counseling psychologists to enhance student-athletes’ ability to become healthy and fulfilled college athletes and college students, it is important to gain a deep insight and knowledge into their mind and their view of the world. Those steps are essential in attenuating the student-athletes’ feeling of being misunderstood, and of not being on the same level with the college counselors treating them (Petitpas et al., 1999). Therefore, counselors really need to understand their clients, and what is important to them.

As Balague (1999) explained, her work and success with athletes is based mainly on their relationship. She described it as:
regardless of the techniques (relaxation, imagery, etc.) I may be using in working with elite athletes, understanding the larger issues of their identities and value systems and what sport and competition means to them in their lives, plays a central role in determining the quality, and probably the effectiveness, of services I deliver (Balague, 1999, p. 89).

Therefore, Balague (1999) believed that any psychological intervention had to fit into the value and identity system of the athlete and/or student-athlete; or in the understanding of his/her worldview. With respect to the present study, understanding Student Athlete Worldview and therefore having a profound understanding of the student-athletes pertains to many important facets. One important facet is recognizing the positives and not only the negatives of being a student-athlete, as is highlighted in the pictorial representation. Not dwelling on their limits, but incorporating their sense of greatness into the exploration of areas of discomfort, in order to use the strengths they have such as: will to improve, being able to adapt and having a high level of confidence. Finally, offering services from within the infrastructure, in order to reduce their time constraints; and knowing when someone needs more than what can be offered in that infrastructure are also important aspect to consider.

Implications for Research

This qualitative study about Student Athlete Worldview is one of the first of its kind, in that it described the identity of student-athletes, in a more descriptive way, and therefore explored the essence of Athletic Identity, by identifying and describing the attitudes, behaviors, values, and skills that student-athletes may have in common, rather than focusing only on its salience and exclusivity. Therefore, this study gives us a more
comprehensive and holistic understanding of Student Athlete Worldview. The pictorial representation presented earlier gives the reader a useful summary of the complexities that the participants talked about, in order to understand and capture who student-athletes are and how they perceive themselves and the world around them, and is therefore paramount in the identification of who student-athletes really are. Consequently, this pictorial representation could be very helpful for future researchers to base their research on. It will allow them to see and understand Student Athlete Worldview as a whole, and therefore conduct research with all those aspects in mind, and not only based on the negative and athletic aspects of student-athletes.

Further research that explores specific counseling interventions with student-athletes may also be of value. While this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of Student Athlete Worldview, in order to help college counselors to be more effective in counseling student-athletes, it was not focused on finding specific counseling interventions which would help college counselors to be more effective in their work with student-athletes. Therefore, it is important to explore specific counseling interventions appropriate for student-athletes who will one day require or desire counseling services. This study is a great platform for achieving this, by using the holistic picture that the pictorial representation representing Student Athlete Worldview gave us, in order to promote understanding and therefore facilitate the development of a stronger relationship between college counselors and student-athletes, in the counseling process.

Finally, a study exploring specific issues or difficulties that student-athletes would bring to counseling may also be of importance and value. While the current study provides a better understanding of Student Athlete Worldview, it does not present
information on how student-athletes currently address potential difficulties, if they even do at all. A future study would enable researchers to not only find specific issues student-athletes would most likely bring up, but also the difficulties they may encounter in actually discussing and bringing up those specific issues. This would allow college counselors to become relevant enough for student-athletes to seek them out and continue meeting with them until their concerns are addressed, and potentially speed up the counseling process, and therefore conduct counseling with student-athletes in a more efficient manner.

Limitations of the Study

The primary limitations of this study are: geographic limitation, restriction of sample due to access, lack of details within specific sports, and difficulty with journals as a data collection tool. As stated in the method chapter, this study was limited geographically, due to facility of access, to only two universities, one located in the Midwest and one located in the Southeast region of the United States. This may or may not be a factor in the nine participants' results, however, it would interesting to be able to have a more global pool of participants, which, in turn, may increase the transferability of results to a broader range of locations.

Another limitation was also due to ease of access, and relates to the sample of participants who were targeted for this study. The recruitment of participants was regulated by the interest of accessing participants, and while the sample had rich and varied experiences, they were selected only from, non-revenue and non-tier-one sports. If access to revenue and tier-one sports is not a difficulty for future studies, researchers would potentially benefit from investigating this population, who, throughout the literature has been shown to have a higher level of Athletic Identity. This would also
potentially increase transferability of those results to a broader range of collegiate student-athletes.

Additionally, phenomenology was used to study participants across sports, and therefore describe the core ideas and important elements best illustrating the essence of Athletic Identity for participants across a variety of athletic venues. It would be interesting to conduct a separate phenomenology to investigate the essence of student athlete identity for each specific sport practiced in colleges and universities, and then synthesize these findings in order to potentially increase transferability of those results to a broader range of collegiate student-athletes.

Finally, the journals used for this study, may not have worked as well as desired. Two participants did not complete the journals, and one participant only completed two out of the four entries required. In addition, the actual content of most journal entries was only usable to some extent. The journal entries seemed to gather more information on participant’s day to day experiences, and how those are expressions of and influences on their view of the world, rather than the actual sense that they make of the world around them. Future studies could therefore, either change the content of the journal requirements, in order to receive more adequate information, and/or change the method of journal collection, in order to increase the chance to receive all entries, and therefore be more useful to the study.

Conclusion

This phenomenological study was conducted to learn more about the essence of student athlete identity, rather than simply looking at its level of salience. This was undertaken to explore Student Athlete Worldview, and hence discover and describe how
student-athletes perceive and experience themselves and the world as a result of their athletic experiences. The findings of this study expand the knowledge that we have on student-athletes and help fill some of the gaps and misconceptions established in the literature. These extensions include focusing on: description of Student Athlete Worldview rather than the level of Athletic Identity; student-athletes as student and athlete rather than just as athletes; positive and negative aspects of sport rather than only negatives; and finally looking at counseling as part of the student-athletes' infrastructure. This information will be useful in helping college counselors be more effective in counseling student-athletes, and enabling researchers to conduct further studies related to student-athletes' Athletic Identity, Worldview and counseling.
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APPENDICES

All of the following Appendices (except Appendix F) are adapted, with permission, from:

Appendix A

General Study Announcement’s Script (Oral or Written)

Good Morning [insert name],

My name is Lara Preacco, I am a Doctoral student, under the supervision of Dr. Mary Z. Anderson, in the Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology Department at Western Michigan University, and I did my internship at the Ball State University Counseling Center. I am conducting a dissertation which is designed to explore and describe the way student-athletes look at the world through their athletic experiences. I am interested in this subject, because I used to be an athlete myself. I swam for 20 years, and participated in many national and international meets. I swam in Switzerland until I was 22, and then I came to the United States to be able to participate in collegiate athletics. I swam for Florida Atlantic University (FAU) for four years, during which I participated in the Olympics in Atlanta in 1996. After those four years, I coached for three years, which was a very rewarding experience for me. But, my love has always been psychology, so after my Masters at FAU, in Mental Health Counseling, I decided to pursue a Ph.D. in psychology at WMU.

I really enjoyed being a student and an athlete together. However, I found it really different than the experience I had in Switzerland, because of the high level of commitment that student-athletes in America experience. I believe that this provided me with the interest to start studying student-athletes’ Worldview, and I have continued to do so throughout my doctoral degree.

I am contacting you today to ask you to participate in my dissertation project, which I believe eventually will help others increase their understanding of student-athletes and allow university faculty to develop more effective services for student-athletes.
Appendix B

Athletic Director’s Written Study Announcement

Dear Athletic Director [or Assistant Athletic Director] [or insert name],

I would like to invite your Athletic Teams to participate in a research study designed to explore and describe the way student-athletes look at the world through their athletic experiences. Potential participants are those who identify as being an athlete in college, and having participated in athletics since at least the age of 12. This research is my doctoral dissertation, and it is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Mary Z. Anderson in the Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology at Western Michigan University. I expect the findings of this study to have direct implications for helping counselors to be more effective in counseling athletes, and therefore enhancing the life of student-athletes on campus.

I identify as a retired female student-athlete with strong interest and involvement in student-athletes’ issues. I have a variety of campus experiences with student-athletes’ issues including designing and implementing workshops on Performance, Eating Disorders, and Alcohol Use, providing counseling to student-athletes, and delivering conference presentations on related topics.

Below is a description of the research study for your review and consideration. I will follow-up in a few days, to ascertain if you need any other information about this project. In the mean time, if you are interested in learning more about this project, or need any additional information, please contact me by e-mail (larapreacco@yahoo.com) or phone (561-278-5993).

The research includes two phases. In the first phase participants are asked to spend about 10 minutes completing a background questionnaire and the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS). The background questionnaire requests demographic and professional information, such as gender, age, race, current sport, and years played. The
AIMS includes questions about respondents’ sport and their involvement in it. The demographic information and the AIMS data from phase one will be used to select a diverse sample of student-athletes to participate in phase two, and to describe the participant pool as a group.

Phase two involves two interviews scheduled individually at a time convenient for the athletes. Each interview will be approximately 1 to 1 ½ hours in length, and will be scheduled about one-two months apart. In between the two interviews, the athletes will also be asked to journal twice a week for a two-week period. Immediately prior to the second interview, participants will be asked to read and review initial research findings. Following the second interview participants will be given an opportunity to review the final results of the study. The total time commitment required in phase two is approximately 5 hours over the course of two months.

I would greatly appreciate your permission to conduct this research in your athletic department, and your assistance in announcing this project to coaches. I have attached copies of the materials I would like to distribute to coaches and athletes for your review. I believe that my involvement with this research will increase the knowledge we have about student-athletes in the college setting, and therefore enable us to help them better in the future.

I appreciate your consideration of my research and would be happy to email you with a final copy of the results at your request.

Sincerely,

Lara Preacco, M.Ed.  
Western Michigan University  
(561) 278-5993  
larapreacco@yahoo.com

Mary Z. Anderson, Ph.D.  
Western Michigan University  
(269) 387-5113  
mary.anderson@wmich.edu
Appendix C

Coaches’ Written Study Announcement

Dear Coach [or insert name],

I would like to invite your Team to participate in a research study designed to explore and describe the way student-athletes look at the world through their athletic experiences. Potential participants are those who identify as being an athlete in college, and having participated in athletics since at least the age of 12. This research is my doctoral dissertation, and it is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Mary Z. Anderson in the Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology at Western Michigan University. I expect the findings of this study to have direct implications for helping counselors to be more effective in counseling athletes, and therefore enhancing the life of student-athletes on campus.

I identify as a retired female student-athlete with strong interest and involvement in student-athletes’ issues. I have a variety of campus experiences with student-athletes’ issues including designing and implementing workshops on Performance, Eating Disorders, and Alcohol Use, providing counseling to student-athletes, and delivering conference presentations on related topics.

Below is a description of the research study for your review and consideration. I will follow-up in a few days, to ascertain if you need any other information about this project. In the mean time, if you are interested in learning more about this project, or need any additional information, please contact me by e-mail (larapreacco@yahoo.com) or phone (561-278-5993).

The research includes two phases. In the first phase participants are asked to spend about 10 minutes completing a background questionnaire and the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS). The background questionnaire requests demographic and professional information, such as gender, age, race, current sport, and years played. The
AIMS includes questions about respondents’ sport and their involvement in it. The demographic information and the AIMS data from phase one will be used to select a diverse sample of student-athletes to participate in phase two, and to describe the participant pool as a group.

Phase two involves two interviews scheduled individually at a time convenient for the athletes. Each interview will be approximately 1 to 1 ½ hours in length, and will be scheduled about one-two months apart. In between the two interviews, the athletes will be asked to journal twice a week for a two-week period. Immediately prior to the second interview, participants will be asked to read and review initial research findings. Following the second interview participants will be given an opportunity to review the final results of the study. The total time commitment required in phase two is approximately 5 hours over the course of two months.

I would greatly appreciate your permission to conduct this research with your team, and your permission to meet with or contact your athletes to invite their participation. I have attached copies of the materials I would like to distribute to your athletes for your review. I believe that my involvement with this research will increase the knowledge we have about student-athletes in the college setting, and therefore enable us to help them better in the future.

I appreciate your consideration of my research and would be happy to email you with a final copy of the results at your request.

Sincerely,

Lara Preacco, M.Ed.
Western Michigan University
(561) 278-5993
larapreacco@yahoo.com

Mary Z. Anderson, Ph.D.
Western Michigan University
(269) 387-5113
mary.anderson@wmich.edu
Hello Everybody,

My name is Lara Preacco, I am a Doctoral student, under the supervision of Dr. Mary Z. Anderson, in the Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology Department at Western Michigan University, and I did my internship at the Ball State University Counseling Center. I am conducting a dissertation which is designed to explore and describe the way student-athletes look at the world through their athletic experiences. I am interested in this subject, because I used to be an athlete myself. I swam for 20 years, and participated in many national and international meets. I swam in Switzerland until I was 22, and then I came to the United States to be able to participate in collegiate athletics. I swam for Florida Atlantic University (FAU) for four years, during which I participated in the Olympics in Atlanta in 1996. After those four years, I coached for three years, which was a very rewarding experience for me. But, my love has always been psychology, so after my Masters at FAU, in Mental Health Counseling, I decided to pursue a Ph.D. in psychology at WMU.

I really enjoyed being a student and an athlete together. However, I found it really different than the experience I had in Switzerland, because of the high level of commitment that student-athletes in America experience. I believe that this provided me with the interest to start studying student-athletes’ Worldview, and I have continued to do so throughout my doctoral degree.

I am contacting you today to ask you to participate in my dissertation project, which I believe eventually will help others increase their understanding of student-athletes and allow university faculty to develop more effective services for student-athletes. Let me give you a brief description of what this project participation entails.

The research includes two phases. In the first phase you will spend about 10 minutes completing a background questionnaire and the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS). The background questionnaire requests demographic and professional information, such as gender, age, race, current sport, and years played. The AIMS includes questions about your sport and your involvement in it. This information from phase one will be used to select a diverse sample of student-athletes to participate in phase two.

The second phase involves two interviews scheduled individually at a time convenient for you. Each interview will be approximately 1 to 1 ½ hours in length, and will be scheduled about one-two months apart. In between the two interviews, you will be asked to journal twice a week for a two-week period. Immediately prior to the second interview, you will be asked to read and review initial research findings. Following the second interview participants will be given an opportunity to review the final results of the study. The total time commitment required in phase two is approximately 5 hours over the
course of two months. Participation in this research project is voluntary and confidential. Your coaches, trainers, or any other athletic staff will not be informed of your decision to participate or not.

Please read and review the Recruitment Letter, which explains the steps of the study in detail, and decide whether or not you wish to participate, and complete the "Background Questionnaire" and the "Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS)". If you are interested in participating, I will ask you to sign the "Recruitment Letter", and put all the forms in the drop box. If you are not interested in participating in the study, please return a blank copy of all the forms in the drop box. If you choose to participate, complete the phase one forms, and you are selected for phase two, you will be contacted by phone or email to schedule your initial interview (Telephone Script for Selected Participants).

I would greatly appreciate your assistance in completing this project. I believe that my involvement with this research will increase the knowledge we have about student-athletes in the college setting, and therefore enable us to help you and your teammates better in the future. My contact information is included in your recruitment letter should you have any questions following the meeting.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration!

Sincerely,

Lara Preacco, M.Ed.
Western Michigan University
(561) 278-5993
larapreacco@yahoo.com
Appendix E

Background Questionnaire

If you would like to be considered for participation in two interviews, and journaling concerning your experiences with being a student-athlete, please complete this background questionnaire as well as the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale, sign the enclosed informed consent form, and return those documents in the drop box mentioned previously. Please keep a copy of the informed consent for your records. The information you provide below is for interview selection purposes and description of the final participant group. Review the informed consent form for additional steps that will be taken to ensure your confidentiality. Thank you for your consideration.

Name: 

Mailing address: 

Phone:  
Cell:  

E-mail: 

(Please circle the best way to reach you!)
Demographic information:

Gender: □ female □ male Age_____ Race/Ethnic Identity__________

Years in college _________ Field of study _______________________

Professional information:

- What is your current sport? _________________________________

- How successful do you feel you are as an athlete? __________________________

- Do you have a scholarship (academic or athletic)? __________________________

- How long have you played this sport?
  □ < 1 year □ 1-4 years □ 5-10 years □ 10-12 years □ < 12 years

- As a student-athlete in college, how many sports have you played?
  □ 1 sport □ 2 sports □ 3 sports □ 4 sports □ > 4 sports
  List them: __________________________
  How long: ____________________________ ____________________________

- Before college, how many other sports have you played?
  □ 1 sport □ 2 sports □ 3 sports □ 4 sports □ > 4 sports
  List them: __________________________
  How long: ____________________________ ____________________________

- At what age did you begin participating in Athletics? ____________________________

- After college, will you continue to engage in your sport?
  □ YES, at the same intensity level □ NO, but I will try another sport
  □ YES, at a lower intensity level □ NO

  Thank you very much for your time.
Appendix F

The Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS)

Please circle the number that best reflects the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement regarding your sport participation.

1. I consider myself an athlete.
   Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

2. I have many goals related to sport.
   Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

3. Most of my friends are athletes.
   Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

4. Sport is the most important part of my life.
   Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

5. I spend more time thinking about sport than anything else.
   Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

6. I need to participate in sport to feel good about myself.
   Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

7. Other people see me mainly as an athlete.
   Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

8. I feel bad about myself when I do poorly in sport.
   Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

9. Sport is the only important thing in my life.
   Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

10. I would be very depressed if I were injured and could not compete in sport.
    Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

(Brewer et al., 2001)
Dear Dr. Van Raalte,

My name is Lara Preacco, and I am a 5th year student in Counseling Psychology at Western Michigan University.

I am in the process of writing my dissertation pertaining to Student Athletes’ Worldview. I will use a phenomenological approach to explore and describe the essence of Athletic Identity. I hope to make part of my participant selection the administration of the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS), in order for me to choose athletes with a high level of Athletic Identity.

I am writing you today, to request the use of the scale. If you would permit me to use it, I would also appreciate any additional information that you think may be useful in administering the measure (scoring system, etc.).

Thank you very much for your time.
Sincerely,
Lara

Lara Preacco, M.Ed.
Doctoral Intern
Counseling Center
Ball State University

Muncie, IN 47306-0895
Phone: 765-285-1736
Fax: 765-285-2081
Email: lpreacco@bsu.edu
Hello, Lara! Thank you for your interest in the AIMS. Please find attached a copy of the article on the latest version of the AIMS (the scale is included) and an appendix to that article that, unfortunately, was not published due to space restrictions. The reference for the article is:

If you decide to use the AIMS, I would greatly appreciate it if you would keep me apprised of the results of your study. Thanks and best wishes, Britt

Britton W. Brewer, Ph.D.
Professor of Psychology
Department of Psychology
Springfield College
263 Alden Street
Springfield, MA 01109
USA
Telephone: +1-413-748-3696
Fax: +1-413-748-3854
bbrewer@spfldcol.edu

Breathe deep. Seek peace.

From: Preacco, Lara
Sent: Sunday, December 25, 2005 8:31 AM
To: Lara Yahoo (larapreacco@yahoo.com)
Subject: FW: AIMS info request

Dear Dr. Brewer,

Thank you very much for your help, and for providing me with the article of latest version of the AIMS.

I will certainly send you a copy of the results
Appendix G

Recruitment Letter

Western Michigan University
Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology
Faculty Advisor: Mary Z. Anderson, Ph.D.
Student Investigator: Lara Preacco, M.Ed.

Title of Study: Student-Athletes: A Different and Specific Identity and Worldview

You are reading this letter because you expressed interest in learning more about participating in a research study that explores and describes the way student-athletes look at the world through their athletic experiences. This research is Lara Preacco's doctoral dissertation, which is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Mary Z. Anderson in the Department of Counselor Education and Counseling Psychology at Western Michigan University (WMU). Potential participants are those who are currently competing in sport in college and have been an athlete since at least the age of 12.

There is relatively little known about the identification and description of the attitudes, behaviors, values and skills that student-athletes may have in common. This project is designed to explore how student-athletes see, describe, identify and portray themselves in terms of their Worldview, or how they see their relationship to the larger society and world. We expect the findings of this study to have direct implications in increasing effectiveness of university services for student-athletes.

This research includes two phases. The first phase of this project involves the selection of potential interviewees for phase two. If you would like to be considered for interviews, your participation in phase one will involve completion of the enclosed one-page background questionnaire and the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS), as well as signing this recruitment form. This will take about 10 minutes of your time. The questionnaire requests that you provide some demographic and professional information, such as gender, age, race, current sport, and years played. The AIMS includes questions about your sport and your involvement in it. The demographic information and the AIMS from phase one will be used to select a diverse sample of student-athletes to participate in phase two, and to describe the final group of research participants.

After phase one, you may be selected and invited to participate in phase two of this project. If you are not selected to participate in the interviews, you will be notified by phone. Phase two involves two interviews scheduled individually at a time convenient for you. The interviews will be scheduled approximately one to two months apart. In between the two interviews, you will be asked to keep a journal twice a week for a two-week period. Immediately prior to the second interview, you will be asked to read and review initial research findings. Following the second interview you will be given an opportunity to review the final results of the study. The total time commitment required in phase two is approximately 5 hours over the course of two months.

All of the information collected from you is confidential. The research materials will all be coded, and the student investigator will keep a separate master list with the names of participants and the corresponding code numbers. The interviews will be taped, transcribed verbatim and stored, with a password, on the student investigator's personal computer. Specific words or phrases used during the interviews that could identify you or your sport will be changed to broad identifiers such as “athlete” or “non-revenue sport.” Once the data are collected and analyzed, the master list connecting code numbers to participant names will be destroyed. During the study, the student investigator will always store the research information in a locked cabinet in her office, as well as use a password when using...
her computer. After completion of the study, all research materials will be retained in a locked filing cabinet for a minimum of seven years in the faculty advisor's office at Western Michigan University.

Expected risks of participation in this study include only possible mild discomfort in recalling or revealing information regarding any unpleasant experiences that may have occurred as a student-athlete. Benefits of participation include having an opportunity to reflect on your personal and professional experiences, contributing to a study that will potentially inform your own student-athlete development, and access to a summary of the results, which will be sent to you at your request.

Ms. Preacco, the student investigator identifies as a retired female student-athlete with strong interest and involvement in student-athletes' issues. She has a variety of campus experiences with student-athletes' issues including designing and implementing workshops on Performance, Eating Disorders, and Alcohol Use, providing counseling to student-athletes, and delivering conference presentations on related topics.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and confidential. Your coaches, trainers, or any other athletic staff will not be informed of your decision to participate or not. You may refuse to participate or quit at any time during the study without prejudice or penalty. If you have any questions or concerns about this study you may contact the student investigator, Lara Preacco, at 561-278-5993 or larapreacco@yahoo.com, or the faculty advisor, Dr. Mary Z. Anderson, at 269-387-5113, or mary.anderson@wmich.edu. You may also contact the chair of the WMU Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8298 or the vice president for research at 269-387-8298 with any concerns you have.

This letter contains consent information that has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature in the upper right corner of each page. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is more than one year old.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration!

Sincerely,

Lara Preacco, M.Ed. Mary Z. Anderson, Ph.D.

By providing your signature below, you are indicating that you agree to respond to the background questionnaire, as well as the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale and to be considered for two interviews, as well as journaling and review of initial research findings and final results. Please return this signed form, along with the background questionnaire and the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale to the drop box as indicated previously. An additional copy of this consent document is enclosed for your records.

Signature Date

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Appendix H

Athlete’s Written Study Announcement

Good Morning [insert name],

My name is Lara Preacco, I am a Doctoral student at Western Michigan University, and I did my internship at the Ball State University Counseling Center. I am conducting a dissertation which is designed to explore and describe the way student-athletes look at the world through their athletic experiences. I am interested in this subject, because I used to be an athlete myself. I swam for 20 years, and participated in many national and international meets. I swam in Switzerland until I was 22, and then I came to the United States to be able to participate in collegiate athletics. I swam for Florida Atlantic University (FAU) for four years, during which I participated in the Olympics in Atlanta in 1996. After those four years, I coached for three years, which I really enjoyed, and I pursued my Doctoral degree in psychology at WMU.

I really enjoyed being a student and an athlete together. However, I found it really different than the experience I had in Switzerland, because of the high level of commitment that student-athletes in America experience. I believe that this provided me with the interest to start studying student-athletes’ Worldview, and I have continued to do so throughout my doctoral degree. I am contacting you today to ask you to participate in my dissertation project, which I believe eventually will help others increase their understanding of student-athletes and allow university faculty to develop more effective services for student-athletes.

I would like to invite you to come to one of the following meeting times, in order for me to describe the heart of this project to you [insert 3 or 4 30 min. increments]. If after learning more about this project you are still interested in participating in this project, you can also complete the first phase of the project at this time. Please email me back in the next few days, to let me know if you are interested in attending one of the meetings, and if so, which one.

Thanks, Lara

If you need any additional information, please contact me by e-mail (larapreacco@yahoo.com) or phone (561-278-5993).
Hello [insert name],

This is Lara Preacco, we met a few weeks ago during a meeting.

You previously indicated interest in participating in a project about student-athletes. I am calling to let you know that I really appreciate your interest in this project. A very small number of participants with diverse characteristics and experience were selected, and you are one of them.

I hope that you are still interested and that we can choose a time and date for your first interview today [make first appointment date].

Again, thank you for your response and for your interest in this project,

I will see you [insert date of appointment].
Hello [insert name],

This is Lara Preacco, we met a few weeks ago during a meeting.

You previously indicated interest in participating in a project about student-athletes. I am calling to let you know that although I appreciate your response, I will not be able include you in the interviews.

I selected a very small number of participants with diverse characteristics and experience, and I am unfortunately unable to interview everyone who expressed interest in participation.

Thank you for your response and for your interest in this project.
Appendix K

Interview Protocol

Hello [insert name],

This is Lara Preacco, and as we arranged, I’m here to speak with you about your experiences as a student-athlete.

Interview Guide

There have been some studies about student-athletes, but not much is known about the identification and description of the unique attitudes, behaviors, values and skills student-athletes hold. So, I am interested in how YOU see, identify and portray yourself in terms of your relationship to the society at large and the world. Through our conversation I hope to learn about how you look at the world through your athletic experiences.

First I have a couple of brief questions to learn a little bit about you and your sport, and then I have some questions prepared that are more specific to this research.

To protect the confidentiality of other athletes, please do not share specific names, or information that would reveal their identity. Before we begin, do you have any questions about how I will ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the information you provide? [If yes, share and clarify measures taken; if no, “Then let’s begin”].

Introductory Questions

1. “You indicated on the background questionnaire that you have played [name of sport] for [time]. Have you enjoyed playing that sport? [If yes, or no] What do you like [or not] about it?”

2. “What attracted you to participate in this study”?

Questions

1. “How do you see yourself?”
   “How would you describe yourself to others?”
   • Give me a better overview, or, general idea of what that means.
   • What stands out for you? Tell me about that experience.

   Pay attention to whether or not student-athlete is part of this description. → If not, follow-up:
   “How does being a student-athlete fit into that description?”

2. “What does it mean for you, what is it like for you, to be an athlete?”
   • How did, or does that influence you, and shape you?
   • How does it connect with other aspects in your life, or does it?
3. "There are studies about student-athletes, but I am interested in YOUR view of it and how you perceive it."
   - Is it important to you?
   - Do you strongly connect with being a student-athlete, or not?
   - Is it how you introduce yourself?
   - Does that influence your day to day life, such as being in class, going out, talking to people, eating out, grocery shopping, etc?

4. "What other aspects of yourself, besides being an athlete, are important to you?"
   "Tell me about them."
   - What exactly is important for you in those aspects and how?
   - How did, or does that influence you?
   - Is there a connection with being an athlete, or not?

5. "How does being a student-athlete fit in with other aspects of yourself?"
   - How does being a student-athlete is a unique part of you, or not?
   - How do you understand it and how do you feel about it?
   - How did, or does that uniqueness influence you?

6. "What kind of strengths and weaknesses do you have as a student-athlete, that you feel non-athletes do not possess?"
   - Are they important to you?
   - How do you understand them and how do you feel about them?
   - How did, or do they influence you?

7. "Tell me about a typical day in your life here at school."
   "How do you spend your time?"
   "Who do you spend your time with?"

   \(\rightarrow\) If necessary, follow-up:
   "How do you spend your time and who do you spend it with when you are not practicing or competing?"

8. "When you think about the big picture of life, how do you see yourself fitting in the world?"
   "What do you take in as important, as you interact with the world?"
   "Do you think that being a student-athlete affects your perceptions, awarenesses and sensitivities in the world?"
   - How do you understand your purpose in life?
   - What stands out for you? Tell me about that experience.
   - What do you want to accomplish and how do you feel about it?
   - What things have influenced you, in the world?
   - How do you understand it and how do you feel about it?
   - How did, or does that influence you?"
9. “Describe whether being a student-athlete has influenced you in your life, in regard to your life plans?”
   (For example: in plans such as: studies, love life, jobs, friendships, how you spend your time off, how your family works, etc.?)
   - What stands out for you, tell me about that experience?
   - How do you understand it and how do you feel about it?
   - How did, or does that influence you?
   - Are those changes strongly connected to you being an athlete, or not?

10. “Can you give me a specific example of a time this year when being a student-athlete really impacted other areas of your life?”
    - How did that feel?
    - What did you tell yourself about that experience?
    - What sense did you make of it?

11. “Can you give me an example of something important that happened this year that made you feel separated as a student-athlete?”
    - How did that feel?
    - What did you tell yourself about that experience?
    - What sense did you make of it?

12. “What challenges or barriers arise because you are an athlete?”
    - What about when others find out you are a student-athlete?
    - How do you feel about it?
    - How do those reactions or those challenges influence you?

13. “What do you think an ideal student-athlete would be like?”

14. College is a time when many student form important relationships and lay the foundations for future life activities. For some students this is hard.
    “What kinds of things are hard for you at this time in your life?”
    “How do you cope when things are hard?”
    “Who do you turn to for help?”

15. "Suppose someone wanted to know all about you. How important would it be for them to know that you are a student-athlete?"

16. “Is there anything that you’d like to share about your experiences as a student-athlete that we haven’t talked about?”

17. “How successful were you as an Athlete?”
Conclusion

- “Thank you for being so patient and answering those questions.

- We are done for today, and I would like to remind you about your journaling task, which consists of writing twice a week for a two-week period.

- Also, I will send you a review of the initial research findings, which I will ask you to read before the follow-up interview. For that purpose, I would like to ask you what pseudonym you would like me to use for you.”
Here are two CD-Write and a description of the self-reflection I would like you to write about in your journal. Also included in this package are two envelopes, which I will ask you to send at the end of each week, with the two entries for that week, posted on one CD-Write.

As described previously, I am asking you to keep a journal in order to gain additional understanding of the way you perceive the world due to your athletic experience and identity. Now that we have completed the first interview, I would like you to continue to self-reflect for two weeks about how you feel that you perceive and experience the world around you, as a result of your past and current athletic experiences. Please use the reflection questions below to generate two journal entries per week, for a total of two weeks and four entries. To protect the confidentiality of other athletes, please do not share specific names, or information that would reveal their identity in your journal entries.

I will use the information you provide in your journals to identify experiences shared by other research participants and illustrative of athlete's identity and Worldview. I will also give you the opportunity to comment on my initial research findings at the time of our follow-up interview.

Before we leave today, do you have any questions about how I will ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the information you will provide? [If yes, share and clarify measures taken; if no, “Then that’s it for today”].

Reflection Questions for Journaling:

- “How do you think your life as a student-athlete has influenced how you experience your relationship to the world?”
  - What stands out for you? Tell me about that experience.
  - How do you understand it and how do you feel about it?
  - How did, or does that influence you?
  - Are those changes strongly connected to you being an athlete, or not?

- “What do you notice about how being a student-athlete affects your daily life? How do you think your life as a student-athlete influences you in more specific situations such as being in class, going out, talking to people, eating out, grocery shopping, etc?”

- Try reflecting on the specific activities you did today (for example going to class, talking to friends, eating meals, shopping).
  “Were you aware of being a student-athlete in these interactions?”
  “What sense do you make of that?”

- “Are there times when it is really clear that your thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors are connected to your role or identity as a student-athlete?”
  Describe some recent examples.

- “Are there times when you feel being a student-athlete has little importance or is not influencing your thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors?”
  Describe some recent examples.
Appendix M

Follow-up Interview

“Hi. How are you doing [insert name]?”

Main Questions:

- “Well, this is the last time we will meet, and I wonder if you would like to share your personal experience and reactions, about reading the initial summary of findings that I sent to you?”

- “How well does the summary of themes I sent you last week capture YOUR experiences as a student-athlete?”
  - “Which theme(s) has impacted you the most, as you read the summary?”
  - “How do you relate to this theme(s)?”
  - “How do you not relate to this theme(s)?”

- “How else do you think that you view the world as a result of your athletic experience (if any), that is not in this summary?”
  - “Are there any themes important to you, that I did not present in those findings?”

Individualized Questions:

- During the follow-up interview, the participants may also be asked some additional individualized questions, about ideas and thoughts that were unclear or missing information, to the examiner, during the first interview.

Termination:

- “Before we go, I would like to remind you of my plan to mail/email you a copy of the results for the study prior to sharing those results with others. I will be asking you to review the specific personal quotes from the interviews and journals that I would like to include in my final paper to make sure that I have accurately represented your experience and have not revealed your identity. I will include a self-addressed stamped envelope for you to return your comments to me.”

- “Do you want me to send you/email you a copy of this project after its completion?“

- “Thank you very much for all your help and thank you for sharing your personal experiences with me. I wish you a lot of success in your academic and athletic career. Bye!”
Appendix N

Interview Probes

Probes

"Tell me more about this experience"

"How was that for you?"

"How did it feel?"

"What happened exactly?"

"Can you give me an example of that?"

"How did that experience impact you?"

"How did you react?"

"What were the reactions of others?"

- What stands out for you? Tell me about that experience.
- How do you understand it and how do you feel about it?
- How did, or does that influence you?
- Are those changes strongly connected to you being an athlete, or not?

************************************************

"How is this experience similar to or different from interacting with non student-athletes (or student-athletes)?"

**Reiterate the meaning of Worldview:**

"How a person perceives his/her relationship to the world (nature, institutions, other people, things, etc)."

(Sue, 1981, p. 17; Sue & Sue, 1990, p. 137)

**Focus answers on Worldview:**

"How does that relate to your relationship to your day to day life, society and the world?"

"Tell me more about this in term of your relationship to your day to day life, society and the world"
Appendix O

Letter for Quotes' Confidentiality

Hello [insert name],

Thank you very much for participating in this project and taking the time and effort from your busy life.

As we discussed during the follow up interview, I am sending you a copy of the study results, so that you may review the specific personal quotes from the interviews and journals that I would like to include in my final paper.

Please let me know whether your confidentiality will be preserved if I use those specific quotes, and if my presentation of your quotes fits for you, when included in the actual context in which it will be used. If not, could you please highlight the quotes that you believe reveals your identity and let me know if you want me to replace them or simply change those passages. If I do not hear back from you by [insert date] I will assume that you are comfortable with my presentation of the results as written.

Thank you very much for all your time and help!

Sincerely,

Lara Preacco, M.Ed.
Western Michigan University
(561) 278-5993
larapreacco@yahoo.com
Appendix P

Human Subject Institutional Review Board Document

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Date: June 16, 2006

To: Mary Anderson, Principal Investigator
Lara Preacco, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number: 06-05-19

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled “Student Athletes’ Worldview: A Qualitative Discovery of Student Athletes’ Outlook of the World Through Their Athletic Experiences” has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: June 16, 2007