

¿Por qué jugar?  
Sport socialization among Hispanic/Latina female NCAA division I  
student-athletes

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Participation of Hispanics/Latinas in intercollegiate athletics is scarce. During the 2014-2015 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) athletic season, only 2.2 percent of all female Division I student-athlete's identified as Hispanic or Latina (NCAA, 2015). This low percentage of Hispanic/Latina female participants calls into question how these young women become involved in athletics and sustain their involvement within sport. While previous research has examined the socialization processes of youth athletes and parents of youth athlete participants, there is little research aimed at examining these processes for elite-level athlete participants (Dorsch, Smith, & McDonough, 2015; Greendorfer, Blinde, & Pellegrini, 1986). Thus, this study examined the potential factors that contributed to consistent sport participation for an elite group of Hispanic/Latina female athletes throughout their youth and collegiate careers. Participants for this study identified as current NCAA Division I Hispanic/Latina female student-athletes. Results showed that family, specifically parents and siblings, contributed to socializing Hispanic/Latina athletes into sport, while family and coaches contributed to the persistence of their athletic endeavors. Findings also show a sense of cultural indifference, youth coaches who invested in the participants long-term, and a significant involvement of the patriarch of the family in their athletic success.

Hispanics/Latinos are currently the largest and fastest growing ethnic minority in the United States,

comprising 17 percent of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Similarly, in higher education,

Hispanics/Latinos represent 16.5 percent of undergraduate and graduate level students enrolled in colleges or universities in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). Considering the population of Hispanic/Latino college students nearly mirrors the Hispanic/Latino population in the United States, one might expect to see similar representation in intercollegiate athletic participation. Instead, only 4.6 percent of all Division I student-athlete's identified as Hispanic/Latino during the 2014-2015 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) athletic season (NCAA, 2015). For female Hispanic/Latina participants, this representation drops to a meager 2.2 percent. Further, Hispanic/Latina women represent just 4.5 percent of the total population of female Division I student-athletes (NCAA, 2015). Given that the Hispanic/Latino enrollment percentage within institutions of higher education nearly mimics the overall population (16.5%), presumably athletic programs should subsequently aim to represent similar percentages.

While there has been a tremendous increase in athletic participation opportunities for girls and women following the passage of Title IX, the low percentage of Hispanic/Latina female student-athletes suggests that varying demographics of women have not benefited equally from federal policy changes. Although reports have indicated a steady increase in the total number of NCAA Division I women's programs through 2014 (e.g., Acosta &

Carpenter, 2014), it is evident that Hispanic/Latina women have not experienced the same levels of advancement within intercollegiate athletics as women within other racial groups.

There is room to improve upon the opportunities presented to this population of athletes given the percentage of Hispanic/Latina Division I student-athletes is drastically lower than both the population growth and college enrollment statistics. For this reason, researchers should examine the experiences of youth Hispanic/Latina athletes (e.g., Dawes, Modecki, & Gonzales; 2015; Dorsch et al., 2015; Erkut, Fields, Sing, & Marx, 1996; Erkut & Tracy, 2002; Greendorfer et al., 1986), and also aim to uncover the potential factors that may have contributed to Hispanic/Latina student-athlete success in their sport endeavors. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative investigation was to analyze the sport-related experiences and subsequent socialization processes of current NCAA Division I Hispanic/Latina student-athletes. Specifically, the small percentage of female Hispanic/Latina Division I student-athletes warranted an examination focused solely on this demographic.

Through an analysis of both amateur and professional athletes, previous research has utilized a similar socialization framework to investigate the overall motivations of Hispanic/Latino athlete participants. Findings have indicated that several factors including peers, parents, and coaches play critical roles in the

socialization, motivational and persistent participation processes (Camacho & Fuligni, 2015; Duffy, Lyons, Moran, Warrington, & MacManus, 2006; Keegan, Harwood, Spray, & Lavalley, 2013). Additionally, qualitative analyses have also been utilized to investigate the retrospective experiences of athletes in order to determine coaching style preferences (e.g., Horn, Bloom, Berglund, & Packard, 2011). Thus, this current study employed a similar framework as the researchers aimed to investigate the socialization processes for elite-level Hispanic/Latina athletes.

The importance of such an examination stems from the current gap in the literature aimed at retrospectively examining the success and persistent sport participation of intercollegiate Hispanic/Latina female athletes. Further, while previous research has examined the socialization processes of Hispanic/Latino youth athletes and youth athlete parents, there is little research aimed at examining these processes for elite-level athlete participants (e.g., Dawes, Modecki, & Gonzales; 2015; Dorsch et al., 2015; Erkut, Fields, Sing, & Marx, 1996; Erkut & Tracy, 2002; Greendorfer et al., 1986). Therefore, this current investigation will provide researchers and practitioners with evidence of successful socialization processes that can be encouraged in order to generate more meaningful and more consistent sport participation among Hispanic/Latina women in the future. Additionally, the researchers were specifically concerned with the socialization

agents (e.g., parents, coaches, peers) that may have assisted Hispanic/Latina female athletes in reaching an elite-level of sport participation. In determining what contributes to these patterns of sport involvement, perhaps the current racial gaps that exist within NCAA Division I athletics can also begin to diminish.

### **Review of Literature Sport Socialization**

Social scientists have become increasingly concerned with children's participation in competitive sport and the outcomes from such experiences (Greendorfer et al., 1986). These investigations have established that children are introduced to sport through a socialization process defined as one "whereby individuals learn skills, traits, values, attitudes, norms, and knowledge associated with the performance of anticipated social roles" (McPherson & Brown, 1988, p. 267). Further, the sport socialization process has been conceptualized as containing three components: 1) socialization into sport, or the social and psychological influences (such as prevalent attitudes and values within the family or peer group) that shape an individual's initial attraction to sport; 2) socialization via sport, or the acquisition of attitudes, values, and knowledge as a consequence of sport involvement; and 3) socialization out of sport which involves those influences that contribute to an individual discontinuing his or her sport

participation (Brustad, 1992). For the purposes of the current study, the first and second components were considered as this investigation aimed to examine how elite-level (e.g., NCAA Division I) Hispanic/Latina female athletes began to play their sport and how participation has been maintained throughout their lives. If we can better understand these socialization processes, perhaps new generations of Hispanic/Latina participants may benefit from added encouragement and understanding of their sport selection and success. Further, given the trajectory of continuous Hispanic and Latina growth throughout the United States in coming years, practitioners (e.g. coaches) may benefit from a knowledge of the sport-related experiences of this population.

Previous investigations have determined that socialization into sport has been linked to a number of external factors. For example, Greendorfer and Ewing (1981) found mothers, brothers, sisters, and peers influenced African-American children towards sport. The same study found African-American girls were more influenced by teachers and sisters than their male counterparts (Greendorfer & Ewing). Additional research within this same scope has determined that peers are an important agent for stimulating interest in specific sports, while the family generates interest in traditional spectator sports (Kenyon & McPherson, 1973, 1974). According to Brustad (1992), these socialization influences are integrally related to a child's

sport involvement. More specifically, socializing influences have been linked to sport involvement, self-perceptions of ability, and affective consequences of sport engagement.

Further, previous research has successfully applied the framework of socialization in order to examine the patterns of sport involvement (Brustad, 1992; McPherson & Brown, 1988). Interestingly, and also consistent with the need for additional examinations, differing socialization processes and social influences impact sport participation for people in varying demographic groups (Baeten, Claeys, Lameire, & Penninckx, 1978; Patriksson, 1979; Stensaasen, 1976). For example, Belgian sport participants tended to be influenced by parents, family members, peers, and teachers, while Norwegian sport participants were strongly influenced by socioeconomic factors (Baeten et al., 1978; Stensaasen, 1976). These examinations suggest differing socialization factors may have impacted, and may continue to impact, Hispanic/Latina female athletes who now compete at the NCAA Division I level.

Outside of the competitive sport context, socialization processes have been investigated throughout both leisure and recreational sport participation as researchers have focused on the importance of a healthy lifestyle through consistent engagement with physical activity (Hohepa, Scragg, Schofield, Kolt, & Schaaf, 2007). In general, it has been determined that factors

such as parental and peer influences play a role in the decision-making process of physical activity and sport engagement for adolescent participants (Brustad, 1996). Findings have also indicated that encouragement from friends, siblings, parents, and school related officials are all factors in consistent physical activity engagement (Hohepa et. al., 2007) . Thus, it would appear that regardless of the type of activity, competitive or recreational, similar processes of socialization are important determinants in adolescent engagement.

Examinations of socialization processes throughout varying levels of sport have also been linked to sport participation motivation for adolescents. Similar to the initial socialization processes that introduce adolescents into sport, findings have indicated that several factors including peers, parents, and coaches play roles in the motivational and persistent participation processes (Camacho & Fuligni, 2015; Duffy, Deirdre, Moran, Warrington, & MacManus, 2006; Keegan, Harwood, Spray, & Lavalley, 2013). The overlap among the socialization processes that aid in the introduction, selection, motivation, and persistence within sport participation suggest similar findings may be present across varying ethnic and culturally diverse sport participant groups.

The importance of the aforementioned socialization investigations can be better understood through the many positive outcomes that have been associated with adolescent sport involvement. For example, previous research has found in both

childhood and adolescence, participation in organized activity (including sport), has been associated with positive academic, psychological, and social adjustments (Dotterer, McHale, & Crouter, 2007; Fredricks & Eccles, 2010; Simpkins, Eccles, & Becnel, 2008). Specific to the current study, for Hispanic/Latino youth, participation in organized activities has been linked to outcomes such as school bonding and retention (Diaz, 2005). Further, Latino youth participation in extracurricular activities, including sport, has been shown to enhance self-esteem, social behavior, emotional regulation, and ethnic identity, which are all important aspects used by Latino youth to cope with negative experiences such as discrimination (Fredricks & Simpkins, 2012; Umana-Taylor, Vargas-Chanes, Garcia, & Gonzales-Backen, 2008). In order to ensure all individuals have access to such positive outcomes, it is important that we better understand how socialization processes contribute to persistent organized activity involvement (i.e., sport) for Hispanic/Latina individuals.

### **Hispanic/Latina Sport Socialization**

Examinations of interest levels in extracurricular activities (i.e., sport) for Hispanic/Latina youth and young adults are rare and little is known regarding the trends in participation for Hispanic/Latina sport participants (Camacho et al., 2015; Dawes et al., 2015). More specifically, knowledge of participation consistency and drop off rates

for these participants is currently underdeveloped (Dawes et al., 2015; Simpkins, Delgado, Price, Quach, & Starbuck, 2013). Moreover, the factors that facilitate participation for Hispanic/Latina youth and young adults have not been sufficiently investigated (Fredricks & Eccles, 2010; Fredricks & Simpkins, 2012).

The few studies that have examined sport participation among Hispanic/Latina female athletes have focused primarily on Latina girls and their engagement with middle and high school level sports, while ignoring persistent sport participation for young adult and elite-level competitors. Such research has indicated that Latina girls were as likely to identify sports as an activity that made them feel good about themselves, similar to girls from other racial/ethnic backgrounds (Erkut et al., 1996). On the other hand, Erkut and Tracy (2002) later found that within Latina subgroups (i.e., Mexican, Cuban, and Puerto Rican), girls actually reported lower involvement in sport activities, lower self-esteem, and lower scores on physical well-being than did boys. Though both studies show opposing findings, it is important to note the shift in how sport participation was being perceived by Hispanic/Latina girls. Similar studies, though not specific to Hispanic/Latina females, have investigated sport involvement for young Hispanic/Latino boys. Faircloth and Hamm (2005) determined that Latino boys participate in sport due to its focus on peer relationships and the development of friendships.

Additionally, Gonzales, Jackson, and Regoli (2006) found Latino boys have often been socialized to believe their involvement with sport can provide educational and economic opportunities. Through further examinations of Hispanic/Latina elite-level sport participation, perhaps additional and subsequently more consistent socialization influences will be revealed.

Beyond competitive sport environments, socialization processes specific to Hispanic/Latino youth have also been found to impact motivation towards physical activity engagement (Arredondo, Elder, Ayala, Campbell, Baquero, & Duerksen, 2006). Specifically, parents that utilize positive reinforcement tactics have been found to positively influence this specific demographic of youth in their physical activity and well-being engagement (Arredondo et. al., 2006). Additionally, research aimed at investigating the physical activity motivation and engagement of Hispanic/Latino youth has examined patterns of engagement from a cultural perspective (Evenson, Sarmiento, & Ayala, 2004). Findings have indicated that Hispanic/Latina females who enter the United States prior to the age of 25 are more likely to participate in physical activity (Evenson et. al., 2004). Further, it has been determined that first generation Hispanic/Latino individuals with higher levels of English language mastery were more likely to participate in physical activity (Evenson et. al., 2004). These findings are indeed impactful given that Hispanic/Latina

females report some of the lowest levels of physical activity engagement across varying demographic groups (Larsen, Pekmezi, Marquez, Benitez, & Marcus, 2013).

Overall, investigations of both sport and physical activity socialization processes for Hispanic/Latina youth are minimal, and investigations of sport socialization processes for Hispanic/Latina elite athletes are nonexistent. Therefore, research should be extended to examine sustained sport involvement for elite-level female athletes.

Based on the current gap within the literature, this study examined sport socialization of female Hispanic/Latina athletes through the guidance of three distinct research questions:

Research Question 1: How do NCAA Division I Hispanic/Latina females develop interest in playing a sport?

Research Question 2: What specific factors influence the selection of a sport for NCAA Division I Hispanic/Latina athletes?

Research Question 3: What factors contribute to persistence in sport participation for NCAA Division I Hispanic/Latina athletes?

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the sport socialization process for Hispanic/Latina NCAA Division I student-athletes. The central question guiding this investigation was, how do Hispanic/Latina NCAA Division I student-athletes discover and sustain playing sport

throughout their youth and collegiate careers? This study utilized a qualitative design and a phenomenological approach which “describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). The focus of phenomenological studies is to describe what all of the participants have in common as they experience a common phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The phenomenon under investigation was related to how Hispanic/Latina women began playing sports and how they maintained a level of participation that afforded them an eventual position on an elite team. More specifically, a hermeneutical phenomenological approach was emphasized in this study as it focused on the lived experiences of the participants and interpreted the “texts” of their lives (Creswell, 2013). The structural description found in a phenomenological approach also helped answer the “how” of the phenomenon, which was the central question of this study.

Qualitative research implies a few important philosophical assumptions: 1) qualitative researchers assume multiple realities are formed (ontological) or dependent on the subjective experiences of the people studied (epistemological); 2) qualitative researchers proceed from the ground up collecting and analyzing data inductively (methodological), revealing their values and biases on their way up to a greater theory which would encompass all the findings (axiological) (Creswell, 2013).

Therefore, it is crucial for the researchers to recognize their philosophical assumptions as they broached this sensitive topic of race, ethnicity, and familial life of a collegiate student athlete. To address these assumptions and to account for trustworthiness of the data analysis, the research team consisted of three women, two of which are former NCAA student-athletes, and one who identifies as Latina. The inclusion of three researchers on this project aided in the limitation of biases and provided three different perspectives to the data.

### **Sample**

After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), participants were recruited for this study. Participants were selected using a homogenous sampling technique (Patton, 2002), as the researchers looked to examine the Hispanic/Latina NCAA Division I intercollegiate female student-athlete subgroup, specifically. Thus, participants had to identify as a female of Hispanic or Latina decent. According to the United States Office of Management and Budget, a person of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity is “a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race” (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d., para. 2).

Study participants had to have participated in an elite level of play. For the purposes of this investigation, the elite level

of sport participation was defined as competition at the NCAA Division I level. Given that many professional women’s sports leagues are in their infancy, female athletes who compete at the intercollegiate level are often considered an elite class of athlete. For example, while a little over 3.2 million girls participated at the high school level during the 2014-2015 school year, only 1% of those same athletes competed at the NCAA Division I level in any sport (NCAA, 2016; NFHS, 2016). Therefore, the small percentages of Hispanic/Latina female athletes who have reached this level of sport competition are considered elite and successful in their sport endeavors. Thus, this population of athletes provided great insight into the socialization processes that have assisted a small number of Hispanic/Latina athletes to thrive in sport.

As previously stated, Hispanic/Latina represent less than 5 percent of all female student-athletes competing in NCAA Division I athletics (NCAA, 2015). Therefore, the sample for this study was challenging to identify and collect. For example, the sample population at one university utilized in this study had a reported 16 female student-athletes who identified as Hispanic/Latina, out of roughly 650 total student-athletes. After a number of participant recruiting tactics (e.g., sending emails, contacting academic advisors and assistant coaches), a final sample of seven athletes agreed to take part in the study. Incentives were provided to

the participants after they were interviewed to thank them for their assistance.

The final sample of participants varied in age, sport, and background. The participants played basketball (1), soccer (4), softball (1), or rowing (1). The participants were between the ages of 18 and 20, with an average age of 19.1 years. Three of the participants attended an institution in the southeastern United States that is a member of the Southeastern Conference (SEC), three of the participants attended an institution in the mid-west United States that is a member of the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), and one participant attended an institution in the mid-Atlantic United States that is a member of the Atlantic Sun Conference (ASUN). Participants self-identified as Mexican (n=3), Puerto Rican (n=1), Cuban (n=1), and mixed ethnicity (Puerto Rican and African-American; Cuban and Brazilian) (n=2). Four of the seven participants were first generation college students. Only one of the participants was born outside of the United States. Please see Table 1 for participant demographic information.

### **Data Source**

Participants took part in semi-structured interviews that explored sport participation from childhood to college, factors influencing participation, and factors influencing persistence in sport participation. An interview protocol was developed based on a review of relevant literature. The protocol was designed to

contain broad, open-ended questions allowing the participant to discuss their experiences as freely as possible with little to no guidance (Creswell, 2013). Initially, the interview protocol was tested through a field test where five NCAA Division I student-athletes who attend an institution in the SEC filled out a questionnaire that listed the initial interview questions. The interview protocol was adjusted per the feedback given during the initial field test. After the initial field test, a pilot study was conducted. The pilot study included two female NCAA Division I student-athletes who were interviewed in person. Per Creswell (2013), pilot test subjects were selected based on “convenience, access, and geographic proximity” (p. 165), as they were enrolled at the home university of one of the authors. The pilot study participants were interviewed using the adjusted protocol to refine the interview questions and procedure (Creswell, 2013). The pilot study protocol included questions such as, “Was sport the most emphasized activity in your life growing up,” “Please describe the learning process of the skills used in your current sport,” and “How did teachers, friends/peers, coaches, and/or neighbors influence your sport experience growing up.” The interview protocol was once again adjusted per the pilot study, and was finalized based on the interviews and how the questions were understood, processed, and answered by the interviewees. The final protocol included open-ended questions designed to elicit more detailed responses

from the participants such as, “Describe how it was to be a child in your home growing up,” “During your youth, was there a specific individual(s) that pushed you to continue playing the sport,” and “Tell me about your early experiences with sport.” Please refer to Appendix A for the final full interview protocol. Participants were given pseudonyms for the purpose of anonymity.

### **Data Analysis**

Once the interview cycle was completed, the data was transcribed through a third party transcription company and reviewed by the researchers for accuracy. The researchers coded the data in order to examine the phenomenon of Hispanic/Latina female student-athlete socialization into sport as well as persistence through sport to college participation. Because this was a phenomenological study, the data analysis focused on what the participants have experienced and how they experienced it (Creswell, 2013).

Initially, a deductive approach was used in first cycle of coding, where the researchers relied on the research questions to guide the process (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013). The data analysis began with a narrow view of the interviews and data, focusing on significant statements which lead towards the research question onto a broader approach in order to get a sense of “what” the individuals have experienced and “how” they have experienced it (Moustakas, 1994). The data analysis also took an inductive approach, allowing for

patterns to emerge naturally as to not limit the analysis solely based on the research questions. A second cycle of coding involved thematic construction.

### **Trustworthiness**

A number of strategies were employed to ensure trustworthiness of the data. First, the research team consisted of three people, two of whom are former NCAA student-athletes, and one who identifies as Latina. The inclusion of three researchers offered three different perspectives to the data. Further, the research team established trustworthiness through verbatim transcription (Creswell, 2013), triangulation across researchers (Patton, 2002) and peer debriefings in order to increase the quality of findings from the data analysis. The research team attempted to capture the unique and shared experiences of Hispanic/Latina females through thick description derived from the verbatim transcripts. The transcripts allowed the researchers to portray the voices, feelings, and lived experiences of the study participants (Patton, 2002). The research team also collected data from multiple sources to aid in the triangulation of data. Triangulation “is the act of bringing more than one source of data to bear on a single point” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). For this study, data sources included interviews and transcripts, field notes, and previous literature. Finally, peer-debriefing conversations aided the research team in viewing and interpreting the data from

multiple perspectives, which also reduced bias in the coding process.

## Results

### Research Question 1

The first research question asked how Hispanic/Latina female student-athletes developed an interest in playing a sport. Overall, the participants spoke extensively about the relationships with their families, parents, and siblings, and the impact these relationships had on the development of their interests in playing sports.

**Familial relationships.** Each participant talked about having strong familial ties within their own family unit as well as through extended family members. Each participant grew up in a nuclear family, where both parents remained married throughout their childhood and beyond.

In general, the participants' family was very supportive of their initial athletic endeavors. Brooke, Kara, and Maria each spoke fondly of how their grandparents, aunts, and cousins were a very big part of their lives growing up, either living in the same household, or in the same neighborhood. Kara talked about her entire family being supportive, stating:

My parents were really supportive. And my whole family basically. We're all really close, so they all helped me out and always told me that I was going to be the one that helped out the family or did something big for the family, and they just encouraged me.

Here, Kara's parents and family saw great skills in her at a young age, and encouraged her to continue to play her sport, potentially to help take care of the family in the future.

**Parents.** Parents were a focal point in many of the participants' introduction into sport participation. Interestingly, many mothers and fathers of these participants played sports in high school, and some reached various elite levels of play in their youth. In general, it appeared parents allowed the participants to grow their own love for sports and foster their own identities as they discovered their athletic ability.

Tara talked about how her parents signed her up for any and subsequently all sports she expressed an interest in, as long as she chose the sports on her own. It was clear Tara's parents did not want to influence her sport participation decisions. Mary spoke about being raised in a family of athletes. She stated:

Basically my family loved sports. I think we always involved sports in everything, and just growing up, it was just my dad playing soccer, so we always go to his soccer games. My two brothers decided to continue that, so they started playing soccer, so I started to go to all their games. It was mostly involved in sports and everything. My dad just decided to, because I was the only one who wasn't playing any sports at the time when I was six or probably five years old, my dad told me to go try out, just play for fun, for my brother's team. I was

playing with the guys when I was seven years old and everyone else was 13. I got the whole experience of playing co-ed and being one of the girls there just playing soccer. That was the fun part of growing up, copying my brothers [sic].

**Siblings.** Sibling relationships were very crucial to the participants' introduction to and persistent participation in sport. Interestingly, each participant has at least one sibling. These siblings, mostly older, held very important positions in the participants' introduction into various sports because the participants modeled their behavior after their older sibling(s). Brooke spoke about following her sister's actions at a young age:

My older sister, she did karate. I have two sisters, so me and my little sister, we obviously looked up to her and followed her. We started doing karate. She wanted to change and do soccer and we were like, that's just weird. I don't know where it began but she started playing soccer at 11 and my parents were like, one or the other. We all just started playing soccer. I was about five when I started playing, and it basically because I was following my sister because I wanted to be like her.

Brothers also had a vital role in how these athletes developed an interest in playing a sport. Isa reflected on how her older brother influenced her and how she had a desire to do what he could do. Isa's older brother influenced her interest in sports based on a longing to show him she

could be better than him. Isa discussed how her brother was one reason she became interested in sports:

I could remember going to his baseball practices and watching his soccer games, and I loved watching him play. I think he might have been the one who got me to even try the sports out in the first place. He [sic] is always someone I can look to for help if I ever need help.

## Research Question 2

Research question two inquired about factors that influenced the selection of sport for the participants. When it came to selecting a sport to play, the participants relied on familial ties and influence as well as their siblings.

**Familial influence.** Many of the participants talked about familial influence such as parents and cousins when selecting specific sports. Maria discussed that her mom was a former competitive swimmer and she found her love of the sport after her mom suggested she should try it. Melanie, the only girl of the family, was placed in ballet as a child. She talked about her transition out of ballet and into soccer:

... I'm the only girl in my family. My brothers, my cousins, everybody is male. It was kind of weird, so I'm growing up and all these boys want to play sports. They want to do this, and at first I was doing ballet and then I realized, I want to skip this. I want to play with them. My cousins on my

mom's side, they were really good at soccer, so I ended up playing with them all the time and following in their footsteps. That's what got me to start playing soccer and then basically where I am now.

Not only were parents and siblings an influential factor in socialization, extended family played a part role as well.

**Siblings.** Siblings also played a critical role in influencing the selection of the sport for the participants. Many participants talked about influential older sisters and following in their footsteps when it came to sports. With brothers, many of them spoke of competing or establishing themselves differently from their brothers.

Tara talked about how her sister was a direct influence on her decision to participate in sport. She stated, "I would watch my sister's games, and I would be like, 'Oh, I want to be just like her.' That's what made me decide, 'Hey, I'm going to go into sports, because of my sister.'" Brooke and her younger sister also followed her older sister when she transitioned from karate to soccer.

Mary spoke about competing with her brothers, and attempting to separate herself from them,

Growing up with my brothers, I always felt it was a big challenge. I was always the one to be with them. My oldest brother, he went to try out professionally and I have some footsteps to follow. It's just me always

trying to be better. They were the greatest motivation.

Mary also spoke of how soccer was at the core of her relationship with her brothers. She stated, "all they did was play sport. I was always part of that training. I was always training with them, playing, and everything was always soccer. I guess soccer will always be involved."

### **Research Question 3**

The final research question examined factors contributing to the athlete's persistence in sport participation and each participant discussed a number of factors that contributed to their persistent sport involvement. The participants maintained interests in their particular sport through internal motivation and their family.

Coaches and special interest relationships with coaches also played a vital role in their persistence.

**Internal motivation.** Some of the participants spoke about internal motivation as a key to their success. Isa spoke strongly about being her best motivator. She often would show up to practice early to run or workout before her teammates were there. Isa stated:

I think first and foremost, it just came within myself. I always took initiative and I always told my parents I want to go here and I want to do great things for my sport, for myself. I got trainers. I trained on my own. I always ran. I took care of my body. I think what a lot of players don't realize is that it's a mental

game as well. I always try to just mentally prepare myself and always get myself stronger. Even if it's a practice by myself.

Brooke also spoke about the moment that she recognized she could be great within her sport – through watching her new team during a practice and realizing she might be good enough to play in college. Maria, who spoke about how her mom influenced her to swim, also took pride in the fact that she kept up with swimming on her own accord, not because of her parents. Additionally, Tara mentioned that her motivation to continue to play softball was due to her reaching a pinnacle level of play within NCAA Division I. Kara reflected on her time as a youth athlete and her goals of playing collegiate basketball. Overall, it was evident that each of these athletes recognized a form of motivation within themselves, which pushed them to excel.

Mary also discussed how she pushed herself in order to be able to care for her family, and so that she would be given an opportunity to go to college. She stated:

The first time I ever played soccer, I felt my dream was to play at the highest level, whether it be professionally or in college. I feel that the only thing that has kept me going is, I don't know, I feel soccer has taken me a long way and financially helped my family out. Basically the reason, I don't think I would have gone to college without soccer so that motivated me a lot to go to college. I would be the first one to go

to college out of my family. Just me pushing myself to make it to the next level.

Mary's internal motivation was not limited to a desire of playing at the highest level in her sport, but also due to her ambitions of being able to assist her family financially in the future.

**Family.** Not surprisingly, family was found to contribute to the persistence in sport participation. Brooke spoke in detail about how her father was involved in her sport growth during her youth. Brooke said of her dad's involvement:

I think my dad spoke about college, and if I wanted to go to the next level at that point. If I wanted to go to the next level, I would have to get better, play on a better team so that coaches could look at me. It was my dad and my decision, but I was pretty young so I think my dad was mostly doing it. At that time, we realized that I was improving so I could play on a higher level team.

Brooke described her father as her trusted counselor, as he guided her through her athletic career. Tara also discussed how consistent parental support positioned her to become a great athlete. She stated, "They put me in the right programs with weight training, practicing. They put me on the right teams. I always wanted to be on the better team. That kind of pushed me too." Mary also talked about how her oldest brother has been able to try out for a professional team, and she now has "some footsteps to follow." She further explained

how she is just trying to get better, and her brothers were her greatest motivation.

The role of family also took a heavier toll on some of the participants as a few of them spoke of a greater motivator in the possibility of helping their families financially. Mary and Kara discussed their goal of being able to alleviate any impending financial issues such as paying for the participant's college tuition. Mary stated, "Financial [sic] with my parents, it's just a big exploration or a big motivation to keep going and try to make it to the top and help my family financially." Whether it was family who pushed them to stay with their sport, or family as their motivation to continue to play, the participants were heavily influenced by this factor as they continued to pursue their athletic endeavors.

**Coach.** Coaches also played an important role in the athlete's persistent sport participation. For example, Isa had a coach who developed a personal and lasting relationship with her and her family. This coach pushed her to join a better club team so she could continue to make progress. Brooke also spoke about how her coach aided in her development as a player and in the recruitment process. Brooke stated,

...A couple of years after I moved to club, a guy from Texas came around and he took over the club, so he was the head of the clubs.... he was the one who pretty much groomed me as a player. That's who I am today. He was the one that did the whole recruiting

process with me, and he was my club coach for about five years, I would say.

We found that these athletes were often led by coaches who were able to see their potential at an early age. At times these coaches even pushed the participants to join more competitive teams so that they could have access to the best opportunities, even if it was at the cost of losing them to another organization.

**Special interest relationships.** While coaches were often a big factor in the longevity of the athletes' sport career, in a few cases this relationship shifted from coach to a much more invested relationship. The athletes became what we deemed as "special interests" given that some of the athletes discussed a particular coach who would continue to check in with them years after their time playing for him or her. In more than one instance, these coaches had a huge impact on the athlete in terms of recruitment, scholarships and financial support for the athlete and her family.

Melanie talked about a coach she had in kindergarten who saw her potential and who continued to check up on her athletic success as she progressed. She indicated that she continued to speak with him as she embarked on her college athletic career. Mary also discussed a coach she had in her youth who recruited her to play at a young age, which would have required the family to relocate across the country. The coach went above and beyond to help Mary's family by offering her father employment

upon their relocation. Once the family relocated, the coach continued to help her: I was there for like two years or three years, and then when I was like 13, I'm guessing, I got this guy [redacted], he told me, 'hey, we like how you play,' and that was when my family was having financial problems, so he also helped my family more financially. He gave my dad a job and everything. The thing was, he lived here in [redacted]. So when I was 13, I moved across the country to [redacted], and I still played soccer here for that team and from there I just played soccer here until now I'm in college.

Additionally, Mary credited her special interest relationship as the reason why she was given an opportunity to attend college. She stated:

I know if I wouldn't have met [redacted], I don't think I would have gone to college because my academics were not great, but I felt that me not having the finances motivated me more to play at the highest level and keep that level high.

Both Melanie and Mary had coaches who were extremely invested in their development and future success. Due of this type of relationship, Mary was able to continue to play her sport. Additionally, while Kara did indicate that her coach provided motivational support, this motivation occurred after she had left the team, shifting his role from a coach to a special interest relationship. She stated, "one

of my coaches always told me I was the first Hispanic athlete in [redacted] and he kept telling me, keep pushing yourself because you're going to be like known for this." Further, Brooke indicated had it not been for her relationship with her club coach, she may not have gone on to play at the collegiate level.

These special interest relationships also extended past the role of head coach. Mary gave a great deal of credit to her special interest coach, who beyond helping her family, also connected Mary to collegiate coaches and pushed her throughout her academic endeavors.

Financially, I know my parents were struggling really hard with that, so [the coach] actually helped my family. He influenced me with the whole education part, too, and he was just like a second dad. The whole thing that happened, I'm grateful that he got me to this school. He got me the connections. He got me into the academics. He helped a lot.

While coaches did play a role in sport persistence and motivation, these experiences indicate that these relationships also evolved over time for some of the athletes. For a few of these participants, their previous coaches continued to influence their sport careers well beyond a more traditional player to coach dynamic.

### **Findings/Discussion**

Overall, in accordance with previous investigations of sport socialization, the

participants were greatly influenced by family members and coaches throughout their athletic careers (Baeten et al., 1978; Camacho & Fuligni, 2015; Duffy et al., 2006; Greendorfer & Ewing, 1981; Keegan et al., 2013). Additional findings from the current study included the socialization influences of extended family member involvement, special interest relationships, access, as well as a lack of peer influence. Additionally, several similarities to previous findings within youth sport socialization emerged including, familial relationships such as parents and siblings, as well as coaches (Camacho et. al.; Baeten et al.; Stensaasen, 1976).

Based on the results, family played a vital role in helping the participants develop an interest in sports and encouraging them to maintain participation. The family unit, including parents, siblings, and extended family such as cousins, aunts, and grandparents, proved to be essential to sport socialization (Baeten et al., 1978; Greendorfer & Ewing, 1981). This extends the previous body of literature as these familial relationships remained factors beyond the adolescent years within a Hispanic/Latino family unit (see Mindel, 1980; Olsen & Skogrand, 2009; Sabogal, Marin, & Otero-Sabogal, 1987; Vega, 1990), despite inconsistent findings in this area (Toth & Xu, 1999). Results of the current study suggest that a participant's family may impact a child in developmental areas such as athletic interest. Further, the familial unit is highly valued within the Latino culture

(Mindel; Olsen & Skogrand; Vega). Each of the participants in this study came from nuclear families, which also supports the idea of highly valuing the family. In addition, fathers and brothers were important factors in socialization into sport participation and persistence, despite the Latino cultural norm of *machismo*. This finding suggests that the role of Hispanic/Latino fathers in the United States may be shifting towards a more supportive one (see Leavell et al., 2012).

Findings also indicated special interest relationships were crucial for several of these athletes throughout their playing experiences and beyond. These relationships often began as coach to player, but once women were no longer playing for a particular coach, the relationship remained. Previous research has not yet associated these special interest relationships with sport participation persistence. Instead, research has indicated current coaches are influential in sport motivation (see Keegan et al., 2014).

There were other notable findings that deviated from previous studies. These findings were significant, as they bring attention to some of the cultural differences for Hispanic/Latino families in the United States. Therefore, the following section examines sport socialization implications, in relation to the findings from this current study. Several of these particular findings were also outside the scope of the intended research questions, making them not only unexpected findings based on the previous

literature, but also critical findings to the overall aim and significance of the current study.

### **Cultural Influence/Difference**

Previous literature suggests conflicting perceptions of sport participation for Hispanic/Latina females., Literature has determined that Latina girls, similar to girls from other racial/ethnic backgrounds, were as likely to identify sports as an activity that made them feel good about themselves (Erkut, Fields, Sing, & Marx, 1996).

Conversely, an additional study found that cultural influences do appear to effect Hispanic/Latina girls, as a number of girls within a Latina subgroup (i.e., Mexican, Cuban, and Puerto Rican) reported lower involvement in sport activities, lower self-esteem, and lower scores on physical well-being than did boys (Erkut & Tracy, 2002). Conflicting studies elicited a review of the data to determine and identify if cultural influence was a contributing factor to sport participation and persistence.

Our findings suggest that when it came to cultural influence, there was a notion of indifference from many of the participants. A number of participants played on Hispanic (and often co-ed) teams during their early athletic endeavors, but did not feel it had an effect on their athletic careers. For example, as a young girl, Melanie played on a Hispanic only co-ed team in a heavily Hispanic/Latino populated community, and then transitioned to an all-female, mostly Caucasian team as her skills developed.

Melanie stated, “I feel like somebody's background has nothing to do with making it to a higher level or not. I feel if you have enough passion and drive to get somewhere, then you should be able to do it.”

Brooke’s cultural experience appeared to be the opposite. Though she played with a few Hispanic/Latina girls during her youth, the Spanish language was never spoken on the field, so it was not something she focused on. Instead, she began to see more diversity as an athlete in her college career. She stated:

I feel that coming from not too much but coming to college was a major change for me because they usually recruit, there was not a lot of diversity here. Before this last class, there was all American girls. Coming in, I think there were five or six Hispanic girls or girls that are not American. This was probably the biggest change for me. My roommate is Mexican.

The experience of playing on mostly Caucasian teams was different for Mary. She spoke about how her brothers taunted her to “stop trying to act so white.” Mary defended herself stating, “Obviously I was around that culture and you are going to change and stuff. I don't know. I didn't really live the Hispanic everyday. I made sure I wasn't into the culture and I was trying to be equal.” Mary seemed to struggle with balancing her familial culture along with her ability to fit in with her teammates.

While this notion of cultural influence did not seem to affect the participants on

the surface, there was an underlying theme of the importance of family, a key quality of the Latino culture. The family unit is highly valued within the Hispanic/Latino culture and is seen as a source of social, emotional, and financial support as needed to promote a unity amongst family members (Olsen & Skogrand, 2009; Vega, 1990). This finding has also held true when compared to Caucasian families (Mindel, 1980).

Additionally, it is not unheard of for the extended family, including close friends of the family, to also be embedded in the immediate family unit (Olsen & Skogrand, 2009). Though the participants in this study may not have spoken about the cultural influences directly, the steady discussion of the familial influence is consistent with general Hispanic/Latino values of family. Further, consistent with previous literature (Gonzales et al., 2006), the findings suggest Hispanic/Latina female athletes believe their participation in sports will bring them additional educational and economic opportunities. A number of the participants discussed this as relieving parents and families from paying their college tuition as well as setting themselves up to assist their families in the future, thereby realigning their focus back on the family unit.

In addition to the familial role in sport socialization, the participants sometimes held a role in leading younger family members. For example, Kara talked about how she became a role model to her younger cousins. She stated,

When I was playing, all my cousins look up to me. They all want to play basketball. They want to go to college to play basketball. That's really the only thing that kind of motivates me now a days, it's just them looking up to me.

Kara's discussion about being motivated by her younger cousins also supports the importance and value of family within the Hispanic/Latino culture.

### **Male Figures**

Though the literature suggests female influence such as mothers, sisters, and friends have a role in sport socialization, we found male figures (e.g., fathers, brothers, coaches) held influential positions in the participant's socialization into and through sport. This was also inconsistent with some of the literature on the patriarchal role in Hispanic families, considering the concept of *machismo*, or the power or rights Latino men have over women in relation to decision making in the family (Olsen & Skogrand, 2009). For example, Toth & Xu (1999) found Hispanic men approach fathering based on a traditional value of family, and were found to be more involved in their approach to parenting when compared to their Caucasian counterparts who were found to approach it as a duty. Leavell, Tamis-LeMonda, Ruble, Zosuls, and Cabrera (2012) found that although Latino fathers still have a general feeling about traditional gender roles, they engaged more with standard care-giving activities such as child care and household chores

when compared to their Caucasian counterparts. Both of the prior studies lend evidence to a potential shift in the United States in which Latino men and fathers are becoming more egalitarian when it comes to traditional roles within the family (Leavell et al. 2012). The current study supports this notion of a shift in gender roles for Latino men, as the fathers held a strong position in the development of athletic interests in the participants.

When asked “who or what do you think had the greatest influence on you as you progressed through the levels of your athletic career,” Mary talked about her father being tough on her, but also how she wanted to establish herself on her brother’s level. Mary stated:

My dad was tough because he always felt that I could do better. Even if I thought I did great, he would be like...obviously he would be proud of me but he never would be like...he wouldn't show it because he knew that I could do better.

Brooke spoke profoundly of her father’s influence and role in her athletic career thus far. Brooke described how soccer was the biggest thing she had in common with her father, and how she cherished the shared moments with him. For example, Brooke and her father would watch soccer together on Sunday mornings. She said, “I had fun spending time with my dad and whenever we would do anything, we would watch soccer. That was amazing. Just being with my dad constantly...”

In addition to fathers, brothers were also a common factor in the participant’s socialization into and through sports. Isa discussed her relationship with her brother, how she loved watching him play, and gave him credit for introducing her to sports. Though Isa stated her initial introduction into sport was through her brother, their relationship was very competitive. She relished the days where she would “show him up” when her dad would take them to the park and hit ground balls to them. Mary was also motivated to play soccer through her innate competitiveness with her brothers. As such, based on these experiences of the participants and despite the role of *machismo* within the Latino culture, both fathers and brothers played important roles in the socialization of their daughters and sisters into sport.

### **Friends and Peers**

While parents and families’ roles in sport socialization was somewhat consistent with research, the role of peers and friends was lacking in the current study. Peers and friends were not found to be prevalent for the participants’ socialization into, or their persistence within, sport (see Faircloth & Hamm, 2005). Mary, Melanie and Tara spoke briefly about playing with their best friends on the same team. Mary spoke about the connection she developed with a teammate because the coach had a special interest relationship with both of them and helped both of their families financially. In contrast, Isa spoke about how friends were

never an influence on what she did. Beyond this, there was no mention of the role of peers and friends in the sport socialization process for the participants. Perhaps friends and peers are not as vital to sport socialization as previously suggested (e.g., Baeten et al., 1978; Camacho et al., 2015; Greendorfer & Ewing, 1981), or the role of the familial unit has become so strong, external influences are less substantial to the overall sport socialization and sport persistence process.

### **Access**

Beyond the relational aspects of the sport socialization process, access to the sport itself was also a factor that appeared to influence sport participation and persistence. For example, Brooke discussed her first experiences with her sport, and how her community did not have a girls' program. Instead, Brooke began playing her sport on a co-ed team. She stated, "It was co-ed my first few years so I was playing with boys and girls." Mary had to play on her brother's team because her area also did not have a girls' program available. She stated, "Basically I played on my brothers' team's from when I was seven to 11. It was this Hispanic league called [redacted], and there was all guys and it helped me a lot." Additionally, Melanie discussed how her first experiences playing soccer were not organized or within a recreational program. Instead, she developed her initial love of the game

through unstructured modes of play. She stated:

Actually, the first time I played, we were playing outside and we would use basically recycling bins that looked like mini goals. We used to put them outside in our front yard and play 2-on-2 with the recycling bins being goals. That's basically how I first ever touched a soccer ball.

These findings suggest that the participants may not have had easy access to organized team environments. Rather, these participants were forced to find other ways to begin playing and develop an interest in their respective sports. Therefore, access was shown to be an additional factor of the sport socialization process for several participants. Surprisingly, it appears as though the lack of access did not hinder their interest or persistent involvement within their respective sports.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

This investigation was not free from limitations and therefore creates an opportunity for future research. First, given the nature of the proposed examination, the small population of Hispanic/Latina Division I female student-athletes made the recruitment of participants a more difficult task. While a diverse set of participants were selected for this study, future research could aim to include NCAA student-athletes from all three divisions to increase the potential sample size. Second, while this investigation focused on the socialization

processes of these specific student-athletes, these experiences may not be similar across additional sports, regions, or age groups. Future research could aim to include participants from additional sports, regions, and of varying elite-level sport age groups (i.e., professional female athletes). Third, the researchers did not include Hispanic/Latina athletes who have not had success in reaching the NCAA Division I level. An examination into the current population of successful athletes also warrants an investigation of the barriers to athletic success for Hispanic/Latina females who may not reach this elite level of sport. In conjunction, these future research avenues would strengthen the knowledge of Hispanic/Latina female athletes' socialization processes and assist practitioners in understanding the barriers these athletes may encounter throughout their athletic endeavors.

### **Conclusion**

The current study aimed to explore the sport socialization process for Hispanic/Latina NCAA Division I female student-athletes. This examination served as the first to explore the sport socialization processes of this specific ethnic group of elite female athletes. Based on the lack of research conducted within this specific segment, a better understanding of the sport socialization processes for elite Hispanic/Latina female athletes emerged. Overall, these results shed tremendous light on the socialization processes for elite-level

Hispanic/Latina female athletes. Several new insights were found based on these participant's sport experiences including strong special interest relationships, extended family member involvement, and access to their respective sports. Our results may provide practitioners (e.g. coaches) with a better knowledge of the sport related experiences of this specific population and may aid in the opportunities within sport for Hispanic/Latina females. Given the trajectory of Hispanic and Latina population growth within the United States in the years to come, our results aim to increase diversity and access efforts as well as assist athletic success and opportunities for these females in the future.

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## Tables and Appendix

Table 1

*Participant Demographic Information*

Name	Age	Sport	Ethnicity	Mother Educational Level	Father Educational Level
Kara	19	Basketball	Puerto Rican	Less than high school	High school
Mary	19	Soccer	Mexican	Less than high school	Less than high school
Melanie	19	Soccer	Cuban/ Brazilian	College degree	High school
Brooke	18	Soccer	Cuban	High school	High School
Maria	20	Rowing	Mexican African	Some college	Masters
Tara	20	Softball	American/ Puerto Rican	High school	High School
Isa	19	Soccer	Mexican	Masters	Some high school

## Appendix A

### Interview Protocol

- 1) Describe how it was to be a child in your home growing up.
- 2) How many different sports did you participate in prior to intercollegiate competition?  
How would you describe your level of enjoyment in each of these sports?
- 3) Did you participate in activities outside of sport?
- 4) How did you first get into playing your sport?
- 5) How do you think you got to this level of play (college athletics)? What factors helped you gain the skills necessary to play at the college level?
- 6) During your youth, was there a specific individual(s) that pushed you to continue playing the sport? If so, in what ways did they push you to continue playing the sport?
- 7) During your youth, was there a specific individual(s) that deterred you from continuing to play the sport? If so, in what ways did they deter you from continuing your participation? How did you overcome this?
- 8) Who in your immediate or extended family has participated in or continues to participate in sport?
- 9) Why do you think you have stuck with playing this sport?
- 10) What are your future intentions in regard to your involvement with the sport you play/played?

#### *Demographics:*

- Age
- Nationality/place of birth
- Race
- Sport played/level achieved
- Parents' education level