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Perceptions of the Fiscal Challenges Facing Athletic Departments of Historically Black Colleges and Universities

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Research has shown the athletic departments of historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) do not generate significant revenue. The financial struggle facing HBCU athletic departments can be explained using resource dependency theory. Specifically, as HBCUs are the most under-resourced member institutions of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), the numbers demonstrate how these institutions lack sufficient funding to invest in their programs. The purpose of this study is to explore the fiscal challenges facing HBCU athletic departments. To gather this information, two different groups of participants were interviewed to obtain an independent and insider perspective of the challenges. Phenomenology was the methodological approach for this study as each participant had the opportunity to discuss their unique view of the current financial state of HBCU athletic departments. Participants took part in semi-structured interviews framed around fiscal challenges. This study contributes to the growing body of literature addressing HBCU athletics by providing an exploration of current fiscal challenges facing the institutions.

Keywords: HBCU, finances, collegiate athletics, administration, NCAA

Historically black colleges and universities (HBCU) administrators have noted funding university athletic programs is difficult due to participation costs and small enrollment (Arnett, 2014; Savage, 2017). Limited funding stems from HBCUs' commitment to serving low-income students and small endowments, leading to low operating costs (Gasman, 2009). With the financial challenges facing HBCUs, it is crucial to explore how these challenges impact athletic programs on campus. Without this information, HBCU administrators may not be able to make optimal decisions regarding their institutions' finances. An understanding of this financial picture is paramount, as smaller operating costs lead to less available resources for athletic departments. Recent research has found that HBCUs spend less annually on operating expenses, head coach salaries, recruiting, and athletic aid, when compared to their peer institutions (Elliott, Kellison, & Cianfrone, 2019). The current financial picture indicates that research is needed to have a better understanding of the fiscal challenges faced by HBCU athletic departments. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the fiscal challenges facing HBCU athletic departments.

In previous studies involving HBCU athletics, researchers have looked into the current administrative, coach, and college-athlete perspectives of HBCU athletic departments and programs. These studies lay the groundwork for understanding the fiscal challenges facing HBCU athletic departments. A discussion of this previous literature is presented below.

Literature Review

College Athlete Success at HBCUs

Research indicates that Black students at HBCUs find more success than those at historically white institutions of higher education (HWIHEs) (Cooper & Dougherty, 2015; Cooper & Hawkins, 2012, 2014). Specifically, Cooper and Hawkins (2014) interviewed male college athlete transfers from HWIHEs to HBCUs and found the college athletes reported feeling like an outcast while on campus at a HWIHE, but felt they had more support on campus at an HBCU. Black college athletes on HBCU campuses consistently report feeling supported, especially from their professors (Cooper & Dougherty, 2015; Cooper & Hawkins, 2012, 2014; Cooper, Porter, & Davis, 2017). Black college athletes at HBCUs have also reported feeling more satisfied socially on campus compared to Black college athletes at HWIHEs (Cooper & Dougherty, 2015). From a college-athlete perspective, research supports the need for HBCUs, as the institutions fill a necessary component for college athletes achieving academic and athletic success. Despite this value, funding the athletic experience at HBCUs is an area with minimal critical research.

The attractiveness of HBCUs has also been studied, as these institutions are continuously falling to the bottom of the *U.S. News and World Report*'s "America's Best Colleges" rankings. However, research from Jones (2015) suggests there is no connection between rankings and the number of applications received by HBCUs. The research reported by Jones (2015) indicates that a different type of student might apply to an HBCU, including those who will be applying to an array of institutions, which include multiple HBCUs in addition to non-HBCUs. With the competition for students, HBCU coaches might find recruiting a challenge as previous research indicates HBCUs have limited funding available for recruiting purposes (Elliott & Kellison, 2018). With the competitive nature of recruiting in college athletics, the finances available for a coach to travel to a recruit, or bring a recruit to campus, could impact their overall success. Although HBCU athletics has been studied from the college-athlete perspective, it is also important to explore the perspectives of college coaches and administrators to acquire a better understanding of the fiscal challenges facing HBCU athletic departments.

HBCU Coaches and Administrators

Previous research has identified possible stressors facing HBCU coaches that might lead to the reported underrepresentation of Black and Latinx head coaches at the helm of college football programs (Bozeman & Fay, 2013). These possible stressors include the multiple responsibilities HBCU coaches have above and beyond coach-

ing duties (Robbins, Gilbert, & Clifton, 2015) and the pressure to play in guarantee games, resulting in poor overall records for head coaches (Auerbach, 2016). Despite the revenue reported from HBCUs participating in guarantee games, research from Lillig (2009) suggests the contracts for HBCUs might not prove to be as lucrative.

From an athletic administrator's perspective, athletic directors at HBCUs are younger, have more graduate degrees in comparison to their peers, have more coaching/teaching responsibilities, and are paid significantly less (Quarterman, 1992). Although HBCU athletic directors have more responsibilities on campus, previous research also suggests HBCUs are not hiring a marketing or external relations employee in their athletic departments to help raise funds (Jackson, Lyons, & Goodeen, 2001; Li & Burden, 2009). An assessment of spectator responses to sponsors at an HBCU football game indicated HBCUs were not using signage to create brand awareness for sponsors in athletic venues (Elliott et al., 2018). The reported lack of external relations employees underscores the need for research to explore the current state of financial issues facing HBCUs and advocates for the attempt to address areas where improvement can help the institutions find better financial success. Previous research suggests HBCU football games are just one part of the overall social experience that surrounds HBCU athletic events (Cianfrone, Pitts, Zhang, Byrd, & Drane, 2010). Research to help assess how HBCUs can engage their fanbase to increase revenue dollars can help offset the limited staff serving the athletic department on campus. This current research into the fiscal challenges facing HBCU athletic departments adds to the literature by providing an administrative perspective into financial challenges facing HBCU athletic departments. The next section offers a discussion of resource dependency theory as an explanation for the current financial challenges facing HBCU athletic departments.

Resource Dependency, Power, and HBCUs

Previous research has analyzed HBCU athletics using critical race theory (Cheeks & Carter-Francique, 2015; Cooper, Cavil, & Cheeks, 2014); however, to expand the theoretical literature in HBCU athletics, a resource dependency perspective is explained in detail below as it relates to HBCU athletics.

Salancik and Pfeffer (1977) indicated that organizations will compete for resources that are in scarce supply. In other words, the resources an organization possesses determine its overall power (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1977). Organizations will always compete for limited resources, and there will always be competition between groups with more resources and groups with fewer resources, leading to the organization with the most resources having power. Resource dependency theory acknowledges that resources are a basis for power and organizations depend on resources. For example, Salancik and Pfeffer (1977) indicated that organizations will compete for resources that are in scarce supply, and not necessarily abundant resources. Resource dependency theory assumes three principles of the organization: (1) organizations are assumed to be partnerships that involve social exchanges formed to influence and control behavior; (2) the organization's environment contains scarce and valued resources essential to organizational survival; and (3) organizations are assumed to

work towards acquiring control over resources that minimize their dependence on other organizations and to acquire control over resources that maximize the dependence of other organizations on themselves (Ulrich & Barney, 1984).

From a resource dependency perspective, the resources an organization has determines its overall power. Specifically addressing HBCUs, the numbers demonstrate how these institutions do not have the funds to invest in their athletic programs. According to information obtained from the Equity in Athletics Data Analysis dataset, HBCUs are spending significantly less compared to their peer institutions on recruiting, operating, total expenses, and head coach salaries (Elliott & Kellison, 2019). With the lack of funding, some Division I HBCU athletic administrators are debating moving to Division II where they might be more competitive on a financial level (Trahan, 2012). This reality creates imbalance, especially in the Division I category, because these institutions are securing funds from the annual March Madness basketball tournament by the team's ability to qualify. If Division I HBCUs do not have the funds to compete with fully funded Division I programs, their teams might not find success in the tournament and the institutions will not acquire access to the revenue distribution.

While it is clear that many HBCUs are facing financial difficulties, it is less clear how these issues have impacted athletic administrators' ability to manage their own department and deliver programming. As such, the purpose of this study is to explore the fiscal challenges facing HBCU athletic departments.

Methods

In this study, both an insider and an independent perspective were used to guide research. Key individuals whose knowledge and opinions may provide important insights regarding the research questions were selected (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). The insider perspective refers to those individuals who work at HBCUs, but have also had experience working with HWIHEs through previous work experience or NCAA committee work. Conversely, the independent perspective is represented by individuals who work with HBCUs (but are not employed at HBCUs). Concerning the latter group, this perspective may offer an unbiased assessment of HBCU athletic departments' financial opportunities and challenges. That is, individuals representing the independent perspective work with both HWIHEs and HBCUs and have an understanding not only of the issues faced by HBCUs, but also how they differ from their HWIHE peers. All participants in this study either worked at or had experience working with NCAA Division II HBCUs at the time of interviewing. The consideration of the independent perspective was based on an association-wide proposal submitted by the NCAA Board of Governors during the NCAA 2019 Convention. The proposal sponsored by the Board of Governors added five independent members to the Board, thereby increasing its size from 20 to 25 members. The rationale for this proposal was based on the fact that:

> . . . major nonprofit associations typically include outside board members to provide objectivity, relevant experience, perspective, and wisdom. Board members with those qualities will provide valuable insight to the NCAA as it works towards the restoration of public confidence in college basketball and college sports in general. (2019 NCAA Convention, p. 2)

Following the importance placed by the NCAA to include outside board members who could provide a unique perspective to association membership, we employed a similar approach in this study. Attaining the perspective of an independent party who did not work at an HBCU member institution provided additional, impartial insight on financial struggles that might otherwise not have been provided by participants working on campus. This perspective could prove imperative as these participants will have experience with both HBCU and HWIHE athletic departments and can articulate any differences or similarities.

Interview Guide

To gain a better understanding of the fiscal challenges faced by HBCU athletic departments, a qualitative approach was used to explore both insider and independent views of the HBCU athletic department financial picture as it relates to fiscal challenges. The professionals selected for this study participated in semi-structured interviews to address the research questions. This method was chosen because of the exploratory nature of the research questions and the participants' expertise in matters concerning both HBCUs and HWIHEs. Additionally, semi-structured interviews offer the opportunity for the researcher to ask follow-up questions for important points made by the interviewee (Brinkmann, 2013). The qualitative findings are helpful in identifying similarities and differences that might have been overlooked in previous studies of HBCU athletic departments.

Below, the questions that guided the interview are listed. It is important to acknowledge that, at times, interviews strayed from these questions based on the responses of the participants. After an initial question that asked participants to describe their experiences working at or with both HWIHEs and HBCUs, the following questions were asked:

1. What challenges do you see facing HBCU athletic departments?
2. If challenges, what challenges differ from HWIHE athletic departments?
3. Are any of these challenges similar?
4. Have you noticed any attempt to rectify any of these challenges?
5. What do you think is the best course of action to help institutions face these challenges?
6. What would you recommend to HBCU athletic administrators facing these challenges?
7. Would you give the same advice to HWIHE athletic administrators?

A phenomenological approach was employed in this study. This approach is a useful approach, as everyone looks at the world differently, and individual experiences shape the way they look at the world (Crotty, 1998). Through phenomenology, we relied on participant perspectives through interviews to provide an understanding of the differences between working with athletic departments at HWIHEs and HBCUs.

Participants

Interviews in this study were conducted with participants from two groups (i.e., insiders and independents). Each group included five participants. The first group provided an insider perspective and was composed of participants that worked at HBCUs, including athletic directors, senior-level staff, and vice presidents. The second group gave an independent perspective and included conference office employees, NCAA staff, and consultants that work with HBCUs.

Table 1

Overview of participants

Participant Type	Pseudonym	Years of Experience	Highest Level of Education	Working Role
Independent	Eleanor	4+	Master's Degree	Director
Independent	Francis	18+	Master's Degree	Consultant
Independent	Penelope	20+	Master's Degree	Consultant
Independent	Olivia	20+	Master's Degree	Consultant
Independent	Theodore	4+	Bachelor's Degree	Director
Insider	Fitz	20+	Master's Degree	Vice President
Insider	Finn	18+	Master's Degree	Assistant Athletic Director
Insider	Lynn	20+	Master's Degree	Director of Athletics
Insider	Josie	20+	Master's Degree	Director of Athletics
Insider	Briel	20+	Bachelor's Degree	Associate Athletic Director/ Senior Woman Administrator

The intent of an interview-based study should be to provide "the chance to look in detail at how selected people experience the world" (Brinkmann, 2013, p. 59). Thus, the more in-depth the interviews are with each participant, the fewer participants will be necessary for the study (Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2016). The sample selected for this study represents various groups of people who work at or with HBCU athletic departments. The researchers limited the number of participants to ensure the opportunity to focus on each interview in greater depth. Purposive sampling was used to ensure the selection of key individuals whose knowledge and opinions could provide important insights regarding the research questions (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). Table 1 contains a description of each of the participants.

Procedures

Empirical material was collected from semi-structured interviews. The researchers obtained phone numbers to reach out to potential participants through staff directory pages on college, NCAA, and conference office websites. Interviews were conducted face-to-face when possible. However, when not possible, phone interviews were used. In total, two face-to-face interviews and eight phone interviews were completed. Face-to-face interviews can be beneficial because researchers are able to examine body language and facial expressions in addition to the dialogue of the interviewee (Brinkmann, 2013). Phone interviews limit the ability of the researcher to examine facial expressions and body language. However, Brinkmann (2013) noted that despite the additional information gathered from the face-to-face interviews, these types of interviews can be cost-prohibitive and might restrict participants to certain geographic locations that are easy for both the interviewer and interviewee to access. To ensure the inclusion of relevant and qualified participants in this study, we used phone interviews when the location of a participant prohibited face-to-face interviews. Each interview lasted approximately one hour.

Collection of Empirical Material and Analysis

Before beginning the interview, each participant reviewed an informed consent document. To conceal the identity of participants, pseudonyms for participants were used (Taylor, Bogdan, & Devalut, 2016). Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed. The transcription followed a reconstruction transcription to "clean up" the conversation with each interviewee (Brinkmann, 2013). Both the audio recording and transcription were filed in a password-protected computer. Once transcripts were available, they were emailed to the participants to review for accuracy. Taylor et al. (2016) argues having participants review transcripts can strengthen the quality of the study and build credibility. The first author then analyzed the interviews to look for common themes as it related to the research purpose. The empirical material was coded and then sub-coded as common themes were found between participant responses. Specifically, events, actions, interactions, and emotions were compared and assigned a coding label so that they could be grouped (Brod, Tesler, & Christiansen, 2009). The process for coding the empirical material followed a data-driven coding process. This process allowed the first author to begin the process of analysis without codes (Brinkmann, 2013).

Findings

The research findings are organized into two different sections: those from interviews with the independent participants and those from interviews with inside participants.

Independent Perspective

In the empirical material collected from the independent participants regarding fiscal issues, two overarching themes were identified: challenges and opportunities. These and their subthemes are discussed in turn below.

Challenges

Amongst the fiscal challenges facing HBCU athletic departments, the subthemes of advancement, history, administration, global issues, and fan experience emerged. The following sections outline the findings from each of these subthemes.

Advancement. The most common subtheme involved advancement, specifically working with the office of advancement and trying to raise funds for the department of athletics. The most common issue discussed throughout the interviews was the perceived lack of alumni giving at HBCUs. It was gathered that participants believed there was a lack of involvement from alumni and that their experience was that alumni at HBCUs were not in the habit of giving back to their institutions. This discussion was consistent with previous research from Stuart (2017) addressing the lack of alumni giving at HBCUs. Olivia mentioned the following addressing alumni giving at HWIHEs:

> There [are] years and years of experience of cultivating alumni relations, cultivating alumni donations, promoting the athletic department. This has been ingrained in what has been happening for a much longer period of time at [HWIHWs].

From the perspective of those working closely with HBCUs, it did not appear that there has been a lot of sustained interaction or experience working with fundraising and corporate sponsorships at HBCUs. When asked why this might be the case, participants pointed to the type of majors and graduates of HBCUs. Specifically, Penelope stated the following:

> A lot of HBCUs from my perspective are educating educators. They are faith-based institutions that have alumni that are not making as much money. Wealthy white folk are able to give more because of the majors they are able to offer as opposed to educators and preachers, or at some of the [Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference] schools the kids grow up to be ministers or major in sociology, and therefore, have a different level of being able to give back.

The empirical material collected shows the possible challenge HBCU athletic departments face when trying to raise money from alumni. However, there can be additional challenges on campus as athletic departments try and raise money through fundraising and campaigns.

From the independent participants' perspectives, there seemed to be an internal conflict between athletic employees and their institutional advancement offices over what donors should be tapped for athletics and what donors should be targeted for the entire institution. For example, an office of institutional advancement might identify donors who they were targeting to give to the institution's general fund. The office of institutional advancement might not want athletic departments reaching out to the same identified donors in order to avoid a sense of "double-dipping" among donors. Francis mentioned that she has heard athletic directors voice their concerns about wanting to raise money for athletics, but they were told the office of advancement did not want them raising money because the office was working on a capital campaign.

Through the interviews with participants, it can be surmised that there is a perception that HWIHEs put more emphasis on selling their product and telling their story. Penelope reasoned that there was a little bit of a historical context as to why this might be the case:

> I think there was a time where people thought, "That is a white businessman. He is not going to give to an African American university." You need to dispel that because there are great stories to be told on every campus and you need to sell these to the community.

Similar to Penelope's statement regarding the historical context of HBCU fundraising in the community, the independent participants mentioned historical challenges that were possibly still causing fiscal issues for HBCU athletic departments today. Starting at the mission and purpose, participants mentioned the original mission of HBCUs was to create educational opportunities and that although some HBCUs were trying to diversify, there is still an attempt to hold onto the fact that they started as an HBCU. Additionally, when it came to attracting fans, Theodore mentioned how HBCUs historically did not have to compete for fans, but they were now facing competition:

> HBCUs come from this space where at one moment we were all we had so you were naturally given that attention from your community. But as time when on, whether you can blame it on integration or access to television or whatever, folks began to see the disparity and they would look at their HBCUs and hope that we would one day match that, but it became evident that our HBCUs were not investing in the same things that [HWIHEs] were.

Beyond the dwindling fan base that Theodore mentioned is occurring at HBCUs, participants mentioned that many question whether HBCUs still provide a unique

service to students. That is, because Black students can enroll in either HBCUs or HWIHEs, the HBCU may no longer serve its original purpose. Additionally, when it comes to working with local businesses and potential sponsors, Eleanor noted that businesses do not partner or donate to HBCUs because they are not seen as diverse and inclusive:

> With society constantly questioning the purpose of HBCUs, local and even national vendors and businesses don't partner or donate to these institutions because they are not seen as diverse and inclusive. In comparison to [HWIHEs], I believe they have an easier task of marketing themselves, whereas HBCUs are playing catchup by fighting the stereotypes.

According to Eleanor, HBCUs needed to combat these stereotypes when trying to work with corporate partners.

History. When it comes to historical challenges facing HBCUs, three out of five participants mentioned that HBCU students are typically first-generation college students who come from backgrounds with little financial support. The discussion around the demographics of the students at HBCUs was consistent with previous research from Albritton (2012), Arnett (2014), and Bracey (2017). The consistency of this acknowledgment, coupled with the continued mention of the overall lack of resources stemming from the beginnings of these historic institutions, has led to the fiscal challenges facing HBCU athletic departments.

Administration. From an administrative perspective, three out of the five participants noted that HBCU athletic departments were understaffed. Penelope shared: "With the overworked staff comes lack of attention to detail." In this statement, she was referring to the unfortunate occurrence of HBCUs finding themselves in NCAA infraction cases.

From an athletic administrator perspective, participants mentioned how the athletic administers were out of touch with the college athletes. For example, Eleanor noted: "The student-athletes have given up hope in their administration, and it doesn't mean as much because athletes feel as though they are not a priority to their administration if they are not bringing in revenue." Theodore made similar mention of the emphasis placed on revenue sports at HBCUs. It could be surmised through the interviews that HBCUs might not be making the investment in non-revenue-generating sports and are losing out on revenue opportunities. Some potential revenue-generating opportunities that could come from non-revenue-generating sports include ticket sales and sponsorships. Although interviewees discussed these administrative challenges in the context of HBCUs, it is important to note that participants acknowledged similar fiscal challenges facing HWIHE athletic departments.

One notable similar challenge was getting the administration on board with athletics. The participants mentioned how athletics were dependent on what the institution wanted to do, including facility upgrades and scholarships. Additionally, Francis

mentioned that it was often out of the hands of athletic administrators in the decision to add or remove a sport program.

Global Issues. Across the board, participants touched on the subtheme of global issues that emerged through the interviews. According to three out of five of the interviewees, the greatest challenge facing both HBCUs and HWIHEs across the board was enrollment. The participants explained that they believed HBCUs and their HWIHE peer institutions were enrollment driven and depended on revenue before allocating funds toward athletics. This discussion of relying on tuition is consistent with previous literature from Stewart (2017), who indicated that HBCUs are dependent on revenue from tuition. Eleanor commented on her time as a college athlete and encountering other athletes who faced similar issues at a HWIHE:

I encountered different student-athletes from various backgrounds that went through the same things and had similar problems in relation to scholarships or resources regardless of it we went to a [HWIHE] or an HBCU. Some of the schools' financial issues are not HBCU-specific.

One common mention from participants was how government cuts on education were impacting both HWIHE and HBCU campuses. Participants acknowledged the decline in state funding was a fiscal challenge facing NCAA member institutions across the board, and that athletic departments, in general, were starting to have to run themselves like a business. For example, they were facing increasing pressure to be self-sustaining and not rely on funds from the institution to support athletics. This discussion expands upon research from Arnett (2014) reporting government spending toward HBCUs has been decreasing.

Fan Experience. The impact of fan experience on athletic department finances was identified as an HBCU-specific issue. As Theodore mentioned regarding HBCUs historically providing the only opportunity for Black students when it came to college sport, now that HWIHEs are more accessible, HBCU athletic programs face much more competition today. Theodore outlined the financial implications of this challenge: "Fans naturally draw toward success, which is a natural thing, and that is just something I learned from working at an HBCU." From Theodore's statement, it could be surmised that HBCUs are still trying to attract the same fans they had when they produced professional athletes on a more frequent basis. Participants frequently mentioned that the fan experience at HBCU athletic contests was lacking, probably due to a lack of resources to invest in in-game productions. As a result of this lack of fan experience, fan attendance has suffered.

Opportunities

Opportunity was a common theme discussed during the interviews with independent participants. Through the interviews, the subthemes of marketing, strategic planning, and students emerged. In the following sections, each of subthemes is discussed in further detail.

Marketing. The most common subtheme that emerged was marketing. Interviewees noted HBCUs were missing out on opportunities to engage with alumni. Pep rallies, digital advertising around a game, and working with local newspapers to advertise athletic events were suggestions made from participants. For example, Penelope explained that one of the HBCU athletic directors she works with often went into the community and simply told the story of her college athletes on campus—both about their success in the classroom and on the field. Penelope noted in her interview: "HBCUs in particular need to do a better job telling the story of their success of their student-athletes, on the field and in the classroom. Not just to alumni. [They] need to sell stories where they live and work." Her statement suggests that some HBCUs are not fully engaging with their community. Having an athletic director take the time to go out into the community could possibly help HBCU athletic administrators go beyond fundraising initiatives that rely solely on their alumni base and build relationships with corporate partners.

Beyond reaching out into the community to begin fundraising initiatives, the empirical material collected from the interviews suggested more community engagement and building a good fan atmosphere are key. Specifically, Theodore noted in his interview: "[Financially successful athletic programs] really cared about the aesthetics about their program, and it really created a comfortable atmosphere for their fans." In referring to aesthetics, the opportunity HBCUs have to use their athletic websites to market their athletic events was noted. When asked to compare HBCU and HWIHE athletic programs, one of the areas where HBCUs have the opportunity for growth is their athletic website. Having an updated website with scores, schedules, and locations of contests can help develop community and fan engagement. As described throughout the interviews, updating an existing website is a free opportunity for HBCUs to use that can increase fan engagement. Although it is commonly reported that HBCUs are leading in social media rankings (DII Social Media, 2018), the other area that participants indicated HBCUs could possibly improve was with their overall use of social media. Similar to the athletic department website, participants indicated social media is a free resource that some HBCUs are perhaps not taking advantage of to market their athletic programs.

Strategic Planning. The second most common theme that emerged related to opportunities was strategic planning. Having a better understanding of the overall athletic budget and working with external groups on campus were noted as opportunities that have helped peer campuses. As far as having a strategic plan, Francis noted that some NCAA member institutions are using athletics to enhance revenue:

Some institutions in our conference currently . . . are using athletics to greatly enhance enrollment. They have very large squads, JV squads, and that is helping enrollment of the entire institution. We saw that in the membership committee where 75% of enrollment of an institution was athletics.

One of the important notes from the interviews was for the administration to understand what it costs to educate the students versus the cost of tuition. The gap in this figure could possibly help the institution allocate more dollars to athletics. Un-

derstanding enrollment-based revenue can help increase numbers by adding junior varsity teams. For example, Eleanor noted how HWIHEs have used junior varsity teams to increase funding toward athletic programs: "I think [HWIHEs] allocated funds differently and on a more even platform as they have their JV teams that could support their primary sport programs."

Additionally, knowing the overall budget was noted as important for HBCUs athletic administrators. Francis mentioned that during her time as an athletic director on campus, it was necessary for her to know the entire athletic budget and even to make herself an important part of the institution's overall fiscal budget. This understanding would include being self-reliant and keeping spreadsheets of all revenues and expenses so that the institution's administration was clear on the athletic department's spending. Additionally, it was suggested that one of the most important things for HBCU athletic administrators was to make data-driven decisions when it came to managing the finances and being creative. For example, Eleanor mentioned the possibility of expanding master's programs and increasing graduate assistant positions in athletics to help fill some of the gaps created by the thin full-time staff. It was also noted that it is vital for the athletic director to be included in the president's council to provide guidance and information regarding athletics. Francis mentioned that even if the president did not take the advice of the athletic director, the athletic director would at least have advanced warning of any budget or sport program cuts.

When it came to relaying some of the fiscal challenges to the coaching groups, participants expressed the importance of being transparent with coaches. The participants noted that coaches could provide valuable insight as far as letting an athletic director know what they might be able to go without for a season if they knew funding toward the athletic department, in general, had been cut. Specifically, Francis noted: "When I worked with my coaches, they were often able to tell me, well this is an area that *x* . . ." Additionally, having a good relationship with the office of advancement on campus was recurring advice to HBCUs given throughout the interviews. One area of advancement that was noted as a key target moving forward for HBCUs was creating and growing endowments.

Students. Finally, in terms of opportunity, there was discussion throughout the interviews about using students to help with some of the fiscal challenges facing HBCU athletic departments. Participants noted the perceived importance of using students on campus to help with marketing the athletic programs. For example, Penelope mentioned that finding some good college-athlete representatives and putting them on the road to meet with the community members and alumni could be a great way to connect and share the athletic department's story. Olivia discussed that students on campus are another resource that athletic departments are not taking advantage of to deal with fiscal challenges, specifically staffing limitations:

I don't think that HBCUs use their students' talent to their advantage as many athletes are walking these campuses with the next best talent and instead of giving them the opportunity for growth with mentors in place, they resort to the safe methods of using whatever method they currently have in place.

Olivia's statement suggests that many HBCUs may be missing out on using students on campus to help with marketing their athletic contests. As Theodore added, college athletes could even help with building media around the team. Using students was described as beneficial to HBCUs because students can bring talent, interest in athletics, and new perspectives. Additionally, it was noted that students on HBCU campuses are the best way to get information spread by word of mouth.

The overall sentiments from the independent perspectives suggested that although there are still fiscal challenges facing HBCU athletic departments, they may be getting better. In the next section, we discuss insider perceptions of fiscal challenges.

Insider Perspective

In the empirical material collected regarding fiscal issues from the insider participants four overarching themes were identified: culture, staffing, roadblocks, and solutions. The subthemes for each of these are discussed below.

Culture

Beginning with the theme of culture, the subthemes of perception, gameday, and advancement emerged. The sections below detail the findings offered by participants.

Perception. The most prevalent subtheme was perception. The participants acknowledged how there is a distrust in HBCUs and how funds are spent at the institutions. The participants reported they believed the distrust was rooted in how HBCUs are portrayed in the news, their fiscal management, and accreditation issues. From the discussion with participants, it could be gathered that they believe donors question if the funds given are being used for their intended purpose. Briel noted that HBCUs need to be more transparent with donors to help the situation "be truly transparent and honest about where our money is going and where it has gone in the past." Participants indicated that HBCUs need to keep donors updated on where money has gone to reduce uncertainty.

Although insider participants identified the distrust, Briel noted that it is important to understand that HBCUs were still tasked with trying to meet the same expectations as HWIHEs:

Everyone has the same expectations as [HWIHEs]. What people expect from us here is the same that they expect from [an HWIHE]. So, we try to keep up with what everyone else is doing, but we don't have the money to do it, so we end up going broke trying to chase what everyone else is doing.

Fitz acknowledged that although he believes there is a general interest in wanting to change the culture of HBCUs, he has not noticed any changes.

Gameday. From a gameday perspective, Josie indicated that although the game atmosphere at both a HWIHE and an HBCU differ, there is still a common goal. Specifically, Josie gave the following description of the difference in gameday atmosphere:

> HBCUs and [HWIHEs] have the same goal: they want their fans to come out and enjoy, they want the fans to be engaged, and they want them to return to the game because that will also help in revenue, hoping those fans become donors. So, I think the goals of the HBCUs and [HWIHEs] are the same, but the environment may be a little different. At an HBCU, you are going to have music; you are going to have dancers. The vibe of an HBCU game day is more of a party . . . [An HWIHE] is going to be more of an [enjoyable] evening, not so much of a party. But the goal for both is definitely the same.

Beyond the difference in atmosphere, four out of the five insider participants acknowledged the differences in facilities at HBCUs. The participants noted most HBCUs had a component of shared facilities, requiring teams to share practice and competition facilities with other teams in the department. Although it was acknowledged that a similar issue might exist at HWIHEs, it was more prevalent at HBCUs.

Finally, additional insight from participants included the lack of ability to generate ticket revenue and sponsorships. Finn acknowledged HBCU conferences have been leading in football attendance, but he was not sure how that attendance is turning into generated revenue: "While the SIAC (Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference) has been leading conferences in football attendance over the last 10 years, I still am a little skeptical in the sense that we are able to generate the kind of ticket revenue and sponsorships that offset the cost that comes with running competitive programs." The lack of correlation between attendance and reported ticket revenue provide additional evidence of some of the distrust noted by participants in HBCUs.

Advancement. Four out of the five participants noted the culture of alumni giving at HBCUs does not help athletics. Finn detailed the situation:

> The differences between HBCUs and [HWIHEs] that are the same size is most of the [HWIHEs] have a history of philanthropy and have worked with alums and friends of the university to provide more discretionary dollars that go back into the athletic program. The history of philanthropy is not the same at HBCUs.

The insider participants indicated that changing this culture would have to start with alumni. However, participants observed a difference in the type of alumni that graduate from these institutions. For example, participants noted that alumni at HBCUs are not graduating with degrees that have high earning potential in the first couple of years after graduation. The insider participants indicated that this low level of giving from HBCU alumni could only help support tuition so far. However, participants did note they saw the outlook on alumni giving getting a little better. Still, Briel shared: "We do not do a lot of asking from alumni, once we get told no, we do not want to ask again. Whereas I am a HWIHE graduate and they ask almost every day for something." Overall, there was a positive outlook on the projection of alumni giving compared to previous years, but participants indicated it needed to improve.

Under the culture of endowments at HBCUs, participants indicated HBCUs do not have healthy endowments compared to HWIHEs. Specifically, Finn noted: "Our endowment is under $10.8 million, so you are not generating the residual income that can be used to offset the cost of running a competitive program." Insider participants echoed these concerns with low endowments at HBCUs and how the athletic departments had limited pull with the institution to help the athletic department financially. The next section outlines staffing issues and participants' perception of their impact on fiscal challenges.

Staffing

Under the theme of staffing, the subthemes of staff make-up, the need for development specialists, and professional development emerged. Each subtheme is discussed in the sections below.

Staff Make-Up. Beginning with the staff make-up, the insider participants mentioned that HBCUs need to hire people that understand the culture of an HBCU because they reported HBCU employees wear multiple hats, and there are fewer people in each department doing the work of similar size institutions. Briel mentioned the most important thing for a new hire at an HBCU is for them to understand the culture. Josie echoed this recommendation: "You don't want to get caught up with 'We don't have this, or we should be doing this.' It is almost like you need to embrace what you have and figure out ways to get what you need."

An additional concern outlined by participants was staff turnover and how it could impact financial challenges. For example, Fitz outlined his experience:

> The turnover does not help in a lot of scenarios. For example, you know the first day I started here, the athletic director that hired me was let go the next day by the president. Two days later, the president who let go the athletic director was gone, so in a two-to-three day span, there were two new leaders in big-time roles at the school. So, even if there was a plan in place to do something along these lines, it quickly got [dropped] because you had new leadership immediately.

The turnover mentioned by Fitz complements previous research from Quarterman (1992) addressing the high staff turnover rate at HBCUs. Beyond turnover, the limited staff in the different departments of athletics was also noted by participants. Specifically, Josie mentioned how academic advisors were not as prevalent in HBCU athletic departments, and the lack of advising and tutorial centers could impact the students. Josie's statement expanded upon previous research by Bannister (2014) that indicated the lack of academic resources on HBCU campuses. The insider participants described how the multiple hats worn by HBCU athletic administrators prevented advancement, as one person had multiple duties, some of which included fundraising. The next section specifically details the insiders' perception of advancement employees at HBCUs.

Need for Development Specialists. Insider participants acknowledged the lack of athletic associations or booster clubs to help supplement athletic programs. Finn mentioned that one of the first things he did when he began his current position at an HBCU was to hire a development person who only raised money for athletics. From the discussion with participants, it appeared as there was increased pressure on athletic directors at HBCUs to raise money in addition to their responsibility of running the athletic department. Fitz mentioned that the lack of development personnel was where he believes HBCUs are failing. The participants mentioned the importance of hiring someone whose sole priority was to raise funds for the department of athletics. Additionally, participants mentioned the importance of the investment of hiring the individual to focus only on development for athletics.

Professional Development. The insider participants mentioned the lack of professional development for employees of HBCUs. Josie acknowledged that funding might provide the rationale for the limited professional development opportunities: "Professional development, at HBCUs . . . it is not that it is hard to find. I think there are really good professional development opportunities. I think it goes back to funding and being able to bring back good takeaways." Lynn and Briel both mentioned professional development opportunities created by the NCAA for minorities.

One common discussion topic amongst participants regarding professional development and how it created fiscal challenges was the problem of current employees becoming set in their ways. Briel mentioned that a lot of people working at HBCUs have been there for years and were graduates of the institutions, so that is the only thing they knew. Participants mentioned the challenge faced by HBCUs when outsiders were hired to work on campus and make changes to benefit the institution. Additional challenges and roadblocks facing HBCUs and their attempt to overcome fiscal challenges are outlined in the next section.

Roadblocks

Under the theme of roadblocks, the subthemes of operating costs and finances emerged. The following sections offer the findings associated with each subtheme.

Operating Costs. From an operational perspective, participants mentioned how travel to play games was getting expensive, especially with expanding HBCU athletic conferences. Finn noted how many HBCU conferences included schools outside of their geographic region, making travel costs rise. Additionally, one of the other operational roadblocks mentioned was carrying non-revenue-generating sports to ensure compliance with Title IX. Institutions are required to comply with Title IX, and if additional funding is added to support the revenue-generating sports of men's basketball and football, corresponding funding and athletic opportunities need to be provided to women college athletes as well. These additional funds and opportunities could potentially create new budget challenges.

Funding. From a funding perspective, participants discussed the lack of funding that impacted staffing, facility updates, and scholarships for college athletes. However, it was noted by participants that these challenges were consistent with similarly sized HWIHEs. According to interviewees, challenges unique to HBCUs were low enrollment, low retention, and the necessity for the majority of students to be on some type of financial aid. Participants acknowledged how these challenges impacted their operating budgets in athletics and limited the number of discretionary dollars available to athletics. To address some of these issues, participants offered several solutions, the final emerging theme.

Solutions

Under the theme of solutions, the subthemes of strategic planning and fundraising emerged. Each subtheme is discussed in detail in the sections below.

Strategic Planning. Beginning with the subtheme of strategic planning, participants mentioned that they believed HWIHEs typically create and follow through on strategic plans more consistently compared to most HBCUs. Specifically, Josie mentioned:

> I think we have them (strategic plans) at HBCUs. I think in some cases we need to revisit them throughout the year to try and make sure we are staying on task with what it is we are trying to do for our athletic programs and in what ways athletics is helping to support the institution.

Participants indicated that HBCUs need to define goals and tasks specifically. Briel mentioned that strategic planning might include reevaluating what sports HBCU athletic departments are sponsoring.

When participants were asked if they believed these fiscal issues were improving on the campuses of HBCUs, several participants responded that they thought steps were being taken to improve some of their challenges. For example, Briel acknowledged that "under our current administrative leadership here, our president has placed an emphasis on managing the fiscal budget more responsibly and that is something that has been a tremendous help for the institution as a whole here." Participants mentioned the need for athletic administrators to begin to use any revenue they do generate more efficiently and effectively.

Fundraising. When it comes to fundraising, three out of five participants believed more capital campaigns could help athletic departments and institutions facing fiscal challenges. Participants mentioned that it was important for these capital campaigns to happen at the right times and ensure there was a method to the campaigns with clear goals. The importance of customer service when fundraising was also highlighted by participants. For instance, Josie mentioned that for both HBCUs and HWIHEs, "because that customer service, even with your student-athletes, as well as fans and sponsors, those are the things that have people continuing to come

back and support your program." The relationship with donors was highlighted by all participants, making sure athletic administrators were asking for what they truly needed and being transparent with where the money is going.

Summary

Both independent and insider participants acknowledged that the history of HBCUs was a fiscal challenge impacting the athletic department. Specifically, participants noted how there was not a strong culture of alumni giving at many HBCUs. Additionally, when it came to fiscal challenges, staffing issues in HBCU athletic departments were heavily highlighted by participants. Specifically, they indicated that HBCUs were not investing in (or lacked the means to invest in) hiring specialists that could focus on generating funds for the athletic department.

Discussion

Overall, the findings indicated fiscal issues as unique to HBCUs. The fiscal issues exemplify the lack of resources faced by HBCU athletic departments. As Cheeks (2016) explained, the lack of resources at HBCUs extend to older athletics facilities and contribute to a lack of staffing. Furthermore, based on resource dependency theory, this scarcity of resources may limit the power and influence of HBCUs, as the institutions may rely on external stakeholders to provide funding for program success. These limitations may be experienced by individual colleges or universities; furthermore, they may threaten HBCUs as a broader institution of higher education, thereby necessitating collaborative strategies across institutions.

Cheeks (2016) offered the solution of HBCUs working together as a conference to pull resources. This proposed solution has proven successful through conference-wide apparel partnerships at the SIAC. Further exploration may determine if it is possible for the conference to share staff. Perkins (2018) called for HBCUs to prioritize and allocate funds to support college athletes' academic success. It might be possible for a governance structure to include the conference office employing an individual to help each institution oversee academic support for athletes on campus. Another example might include hiring a development employee at the conference office for the purpose of helping individual member institutions create fundraising campaigns. Although a possible solution, this suggestion relates back to resource dependency theory as the institutions would become more dependent on the conference office and possibly lose decision making power.

One challenge highlighted in this study included the culture of alumni giving at HBCUs. This result expands upon previous research from Stuart (2017), suggesting potential donors do not appear to be making the investment in HBCUs. Previous research has found a connection between athletic success and financial contributions from private donors (Walker, 2015). The results of the current study extend these findings to HBCUs as they relate back to resource dependency theory because the institutions are dependent on their external stakeholders for financial contributions and may need to adjust athletic department strategies to meet the motives of external

stakeholders. However, it should be noted that even though this study indicated there is not a strong giving culture in place on HBCU campuses, participants agreed that HBCUs were not putting the best fundraising and institutional development practices in place to improve the financial outlook for the institution. This finding supports previous literature indicating HBCUs are not hiring marketing or external relations employees (Jackson et al., 2001; Li & Burden, 2009). The lack of marketing or external relation employees possibly indicates that some HBCUs might not be selling the story of their institutions. As Salancik and Pfeffer (1977) indicated, organizations will compete for resources that are in scarce supply. With no marketing or external relation employees to lead fundraising efforts, HBCUs might continue to lose already-scarce fundraising dollars to peer institutions thus reflecting resource dependency theory.

From an administrative perspective, participants in the current study indicated that staff at many HBCUs are overworked and may not necessarily be the right fit for their positions. Staff can serve as crucial resources for institutions. Salancik and Pfeffer (1977) indicated the resources an organization has determines its overall power; thus resource dependency theory is reflected in the overworked administration. This finding indicates HBCUs may benefit from the NCAA publishing recommended guidelines to include minimum qualifications and job requirements for necessary positions in the athletic department. As HBCUs might have limited funding for search committees, best practice documents can be used as a free resource to help the institutions ensure proper hires. The NCAA Division II Athletic Director Association currently publishes a Model Athletic Department Document. Expanding this document to include suggested education and experience recommendations for various positions could prove helpful. For example, it would be helpful for the Director of Athletics position to require a successful fundraising background. Coupet (2013) indicated it might be helpful for HBCUs facing limited resources to hire leaders, such as Athletic Directors and Presidents, who might not have as relevant experience in HBCU governance, but have an understanding of the "organizational behavior with the resource environment, and who have familiarity with the diverse resource pools that the organization might find attractive" (p. 366). When staffing, it might prove helpful for search committees to look beyond HBCUs for employees.

Additionally, HBCU employees were not receiving adequate professional development opportunities. The lack of professional development opportunities could contribute to the stagnant work cycle at HBCUs, preventing the institutions from employing innovative solutions to address the fiscal challenges they face on campus. However, although administrators reported a sense of a lack of professional development opportunities, Johnson (2013) indicated that the NCAA has been responsive to the challenges facing HBCUs and has implemented programming to provide professional development opportunities. Specifically, the research from Johnson (2013) highlighted the Supplemental Support Fund program established by the NCAA to provide professional development to enhance college athletes' academic performance. Expanding upon current professional development opportunities offered, the NCAA could provide more relevant opportunities to meet the needs of HBCU athletic employees. These opportunities could include conferences and symposia re-

lated to best practices in marketing, fundraising efforts, and fiscal management in athletics. However, as mentioned previously, if HBCUs continue to depend on the NCAA or other governing bodies for resources, they might jeopardize decision-making power in the NCAA membership.

The HBCU campus culture was another area discussed by participants. The discussion implied that there is an internal conflict within HBCUs around the original mission and purpose of educating Black students, and how the purpose of HBCUs has evolved over time. The result of this change has led to shrinking enrollment and thus less revenue from tuition (Camera, 2017). As HBCUs are predominantly funded through tuition, the lack of enrollment directly impacts the budget for the institution and creates fiscal challenges and supports the theme of resource dependency theory. However, as stated by Lockett (2017), HBCUs play a role in educating a diverse body of students that might not have had the access to HWIHEs. Lockett recommended policy makers and higher education experts collaborate to determine the value offered by these institutions when determining financial allocation to these institutions.

Relating to revenue opportunities, specifically game guarantees, it is important for HBCUs to capitalize on the details of signed contracts. For example, some HBCU football teams that participate in annual football classics receive additional bonuses for increased fan attendance at games. Classics are traditionally neutral site events that involve more than just the football game between two HBCUs; the classics include events such as the battle of the bands, step shows, and parades. According to Lillig (2009), Florida A&M University receives a $25,000 bonus to their contract with the Circle City Classic if they exceed 57,000 people in attendance. Taking advantage of these contract incentives can help HBCUs increase revenue for their athletic department.

When discussing possible solutions to the fiscal challenges facing HBCUs, participants indicated that HBCUs are not participating in strategic planning. Additionally, from a fundraising standpoint, HBCUs could do more work on the advancement side with capital campaigns and building endowments. This finding echoes the need highlighted by Lee and Keys (2013) for HBCUs to find creative ways to increase revenue by cultivating relationships with alumni and other partnerships. The findings of this current study suggested that HBCUs are working toward building endowments and initiating capital campaigns. This result expands upon previous research from Gasman (2009) that indicated HBCUs have small endowments, thereby limiting funding for their campus. These initiatives could help HBCUs counter fiscal challenges faced by their institution and put them on a more even financial playing field.

As suggested by Cooper et al. (2014), it could be advantageous for HBCU athletic departments to work collectively to prevent oppression in the NCAA structure. This could mean strategizing as a collective unit when pursuing conference wide contracts. For example, the SIAC continues to make conference-wide deals at the benefit of their individual member institutions. Combining resources could help strengthen the power HBCU member institutions have within the NCAA structure.

Concluding Remarks

In light of the findings of this study, it is important that future research continues to find ways for HBCUs to capitalize on revenue generation and strategic planning to help make the best of the limited resources these institutions have for the athletic departments. From a strategic planning perspective, it is important that future research looks into the best practices that peer institutions have already implemented to understand what practices might work for HBCU athletic administrators. Research to guide staff members at HBCUs can assist in determining the best practices for their institutions. Specifically, research analyzing college-athlete experience, operations, travel, scholarships, and fundraising can aid athletic administrators already spread thin with developing a strategic plan that can be immediately impactful in their athletic department. Additionally, future research could aid in comprehending the cultural dynamics that HBCU athletic departments have to sell to corporate sponsors and alumni.

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that HBCU athletic departments have potential. All participants in this study indicated that HBCU athletic departments have a great product and story to sell when endeavoring to generate additional revenue. Acknowledging the historical fiscal challenges may prove beneficial when conveying revenue generation proposals to sponsors, donors, and alumni. Once the stories are told, it will be interesting to watch the development of revenue generation capabilities, and how these underfunded institutions might be able to capitalize on additional revenue streams that they are currently not taking advantage of in their athletic departments.

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Health and Well-Being Measures of Collegiate Athlete and Non-Athlete Graduates

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American collegiate sport participation has been linked with psychosocial and career-related benefits as well as with mental and physical health risks, with extant research revealing mixed results. The study purpose, informed by the Health through Sport Conceptual Model, was to describe and compare associations among health-related quality of life and psychosocial measures of former U.S. collegiate athletes (n = 594) and non-athletes (n = 742) from four university graduation cohorts. Results suggest on aggregate former collegiate athletes report more positive outcomes than their non-athlete peers. Study findings were, in some instances, mitigated/reversed when participants endorsed concussion, career ending injury or revenue sport participation histories or were female. Results provide some support for protective associations/benefits of collegiate athletics participation and inform the work of practitioners working with athletes during and after the collegiate sport experience. This study also provides a theoretical bridge from intercollegiate athletics to broader sport promotion literature.

Keywords: athlete perceptions, intercollegiate athletics, social psychology

Intercollegiate athletics overseen by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) provides opportunities for more than 490,000 young adults annually to participate in organized competitive sport (Irick, 2017). Yet, the nature of this sport exposure is not homogeneous. Physical demands may differ by sport (Kerr et al., 2015), competition level, gender, coaching (e.g., Singer, 2008), and other contextual differences (e.g., sport revenue generation). Thus, the potential for different athlete psychosocial demands and outcomes exists within a given experience context. College sport participation has been linked with social, psychological, and career-related benefits (e.g., Armstrong & Oomen-Early, 2009; Berg et al., 2015; Chalfin et al., 2015; Inoue et al., 2013; Spaaij & Schulenkorf, 2014; Warner & Dixon, 2011; Weight et al., 2018; Weight et al., 2014). However, elite competitive sport participation can also expose athletes to both short and long-term risks to their mental and physical health (e.g., Brooks et al., 2014; Houston et al., 2016; Huang et al., 2007). During their careers, as many as thirty-three percent of college athletes may experi-

ence symptoms of depression (Cox et al., 2017) with anxiety also being a common concern according to NCAA data (NCAA, 2016b). Moreover, maladaptive psychological health outcomes of disordered eating behaviors are also common concerns of collegiate athletes (Petrie et al., 2008).

However, lifespan outcomes beyond the collegiate sport experience are also important to consider beyond the transition from collegiate sport participation. Both research and high-profile case examples have prompted societal concern and discussion surrounding the potential long-term effects associated with competing in American collegiate sport (e.g., Gayles & Blanchard, 2018; Weight & Cooper, 2015). Yet, to date there is relatively little research to inform this public health concern. This study addresses this gap by using the Health through Sport Conceptual Model to inform a comparison of health-related quality of life and psychosocial outcomes of former U.S. NCAA Division I Power Five collegiate athletes and non-athletes.

Theoretical Framework

The Health through Sport Conceptual Model (Eime et al., 2013) theoretical/conceptual framework guided the examination of health-related quality of life and psychosocial outcomes in the current study. Based on a thorough literature review (Eime et al., 2013), this model was developed because of insufficient evidence underpinning levels/types of physical activity associated with psychological and social health benefits. The resulting Health through Sport Conceptual Model (see Figure 1) describes the positive relationships between sport participation and physical, psychological, and social health domains and is built upon substantive evidence of these domains associated with participation in sport (e.g., Hansen et al., 2003; Linver et al., 2009). Evidence from this meta-analysis also led to a conclusion that participation in team sports rather than isolated (i.e., non-social) activity is associated with increased health measures (e.g., Howie et al., 2010; Michaud et al., 2006; Taliaferro et al., 2008; Valois et al., 2004).

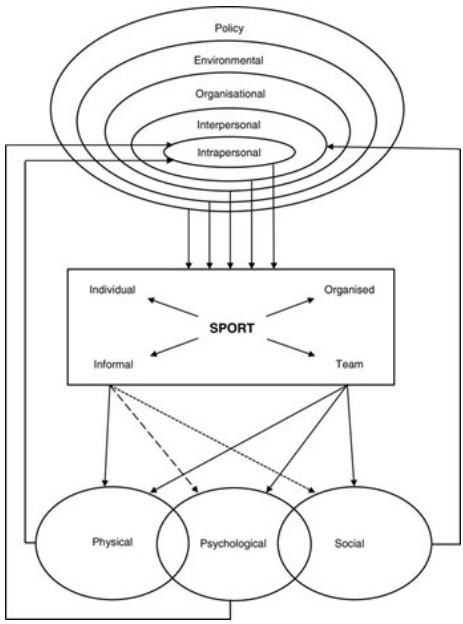

Figure 1. Health through Sport Conceptual Model (Eime, Young, Harvey, Charity, Payne, 2013)

The Eime et al. (2013) model was created in the context of children and adolescents but has been extended to older adults' sport participation in follow-up research (e.g., Hulteen et al., 2018). It forms a rich conceptual foundation for

additional research into the outcomes of sport participation in other contexts, including American intercollegiate athletics – the focus of the current research. In the current study, we examine athlete outcomes in each of the three intra- and inter-personal impact categories of health through sport participation (physical, psychological, and social) in order to test the theorized associations in this new sport context of U.S. intercollegiate athletics. These associations can be utilized to build a theoretical bridge from the current literature on intercollegiate athletics participation "outcomes" and "benefits" to those utilized more broadly in health and sport promotion literature on physical, psychological, and social impacts of general participation. The "outcomes" and "benefits" nomenclature is broadly used in this research, though in the absence of controlled or randomized longitudinal studies which assess all three impact categories (i.e., physical, psychological, and social), it is difficult to demonstrate causality between associations of sport participation and post-collegiate measures (Eime et al., 2013; Weight et al., 2018). The measures of interest in this study were informed by the Health through Sport Conceptual Model. Specifically, we utilized valid and reliable psychometric measures to examine associations of model components of intercollegiate athletics participation with physical, psychological, and social outcomes.

Health-Related Quality of Life Among Former College Athletes and Non-Athletes

To date, a limited number of studies have compared health outcomes of former athletes with non-athletes. Simon and Docherty (2014) examined the health-related quality of life (HRQoL) of 40-65-year-old alumni from one university. Their sample included active non-athletes who participated in recreational activity, club, or intramural sport while attending college (n = 225) and intercollegiate varsity athletes (n = 232). The sample of former athletes yielded significantly worse scores on physical function, sleep, and pain interference, and significantly better scores on depression and fatigue than their control-sample active peers. Researchers concluded HRQoL to be lower in the former varsity athlete sample because "the demands of Division I athletics may result in injuries that linger into adulthood and possibly make participants incapable of staying active as they age" (p. 1), though the lower scores for depression and fatigue for former athletes also indicated some positive associations. Additional findings of physical risk associated with collegiate athletics participation were found when athlete alumni from a single university were tracked five-years post-collegiate participation (albeit with no non-athlete comparison group). Authors concluded collegiate athletics participation is linked with "substantial physical cost" defined as long-term risk of incurring a disabling physical condition (Brooks et al., 2014, p. 1).

Another study (Kerr et al., 2014) compared physical and mental health outcomes of graduated athletes (ages 18-54) at one institution with general US population norms. Results revealed athletes sampled (n = 797) to be similar to US population norms on most study outcomes. However, athletes were less likely to have depression, bipolar, or attention deficit disorders, and more likely to exhibit alcohol dependence or disordered eating. Physical health (via Veterans Rand 12 physical

functioning scores) was worse among athletes who had incurred three or more concussions or a career-ending injury. These generally positive findings were supported in a meta-analysis of eight athlete HRQoL studies which found former athletes to exhibit overall better reported HRQoL than non-athletes, and athletes reporting no injury history to report greater HRQoL than athletes reporting an injury history, though overall effect sizes were small (Houston et al., 2016).

Health-Related Quality of Life Among Current College Student Athletes and Non-Athletes

Finally, a recent study (Snedden et al., 2019) compared self-report physical activity involvement and HRQoL measures between current undergraduate Division I athletes (n = 842) and general undergraduate students (n = 1322) with varying levels of physical activity participation. Overall, study results showed, after controlling for potential sex differences, collegiate sport participation to be protective for participant mental (but not physical) functioning. Interestingly, current collegiate athletes endorsed the highest mental functioning, followed by club sport, intramural sport or regularly active college student participants. Physically inactive participants sampled reported the lowest levels of mental functioning. This study showcased potential protective benefits of college sport participation possibly driven by the required physical activity exposure. However, notable risks of physical activity exposure were not accounted for such as injury or transition from sport (i.e., for former athletes).

Study Significance

Research comparing the long-term health and well-being of former American collegiate athletes has shown mixed results. One notable limitation of extant work in this area is that amalgamated HRQoL measures, though useful for illustrating broad patterns of functioning, fail to also target specific psychosocial markers (e.g., social support, perceived stress, life satisfaction) salient to sport transition and identity (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Research would benefit from the use of targeted psychosocial markers (i.e., social support, perceived stress, life satisfaction), in addition to HRQoL variables, to further understand former collegiate athlete post-career experiences via enhanced knowledge of athlete support networks, stress experiences, and overall psychological well-being. Moreover, differences in sample demographics, sampling strategies, and sample-specific environmental influences both during and post-college could have contributed to extant research differences. Such limitations merit continued examination, guided by psychosocial theory, including random sampling and non-athlete controls. Addressing these limitations, the purpose of this study was to describe and compare the HRQoL, social support, perceived stress, and life satisfaction of former collegiate athletes and non-athletes. Environmental factors germane to former athlete health and well-being (i.e., gender, revenue sport status, concussion history, career ending injury history) were also considered. This line of research unearthing important differences in former college athletes and non-athletes could inform the development of interventions designed to support the unique lifespan health and well-being needs of both populations. Specific hypotheses informed

by the extant research include:

H_1: There would be no differences in markers of health and well-being between former collegiate athletes and non-athletes,
H_2: There would be no differences in markers of health and well-being among former athletes based on gender or sport type (e.g., "revenue vs. non-revenue"), and
H_3: Former athletes who experienced two or more concussions and/or a career-ending injury would endorse significantly lower health and well-being than non-endorsers.

Method

Participants

Study participants were varsity athlete and non-varsity athlete graduates (see Table 1) from a large, Southeastern public university in the United States that competed in a "Power Five" NCAA conference. Participants will be referred to throughout the manuscript as athletes or non-athletes. Notably, the non-athlete cohort may have included individuals who participated in club, intramural, or recreational (but not varsity) sports as a college student. Members of the target population graduated from this institution in cohorts including graduating classes of 2005 (10 years post-graduation), 1995 (20 years post-graduation), 1985 (30 years post-graduation), and 1975 (40 years post-graduation). Each cohort included the graduating classes immediately before and after the target graduation year in order to boost sample sizes. For example, for the 10-year cohort, graduates from 2004, 2005, and 2006 were sampled. The entire population of athletes and a random sample of non-athletes from each graduation class of interest were invited to participate in the study. Approximately 500 athletes and 500 non-athletes were contacted in each of the four graduation cohorts from the institution, totaling 3,936 surveys distributed. The final sample (N = 1,336) consisted of (n = 594) former collegiate athletes and (n = 742) former non-athletes, 688 men and 643 women (5 non-specified). Recruitment procedures yielded a response rate of 34%. Cohorts were relatively equal with 322 participants (24.1%) from the 10-year post-graduation cohort, 338 (25.3%) from the 20 year post-graduation cohort, 351 (26.3%) from the 30 year post-graduation cohort and 305 (22.8%) from the 40 year post-graduation cohort (20 non-specified). The majority of participants (n = 1196, 89.5%) identified as Caucasian with the remaining participants identifying as African-American (n = 91, 6.8%), Hispanic (n = 4, 0.3%), Asian (n = 23, 1.7%), Native American (n = 6, 0.4%), Pacific Islander (n = 1, 0.1%), other (n = 13, 1.0%), or non-specified (n = 2, 0.1%). Complete demographic information for the full participant sample is described in Table 1. For the former athlete group, 58% (n = 346) identified as male vs. female (n = 245, 42%), 36% (n = 216) participated in a revenue sport, 15% (n = 92) reported a concussion history, and 14% (n = 86) reported a career-ending-injury.

Table 1

Demographic Information

	Athletes		Non-Athletes	
	%	*n*	%	*n*
Gender				
Male	58%	346	46%	342
Female	42%	245	54%	398
Graduation Cohort				
2004-2006	22%	130	26%	192
1994-1996	27%	163	24%	175
1984-1986	26%	154	27%	197
1974-1976	23%	139	22%	166
Ethnicity				
Caucasian	90%	532	90%	664
African American	7%	44	6%	47
Hispanic	0.2%	1	0.4%	3
Asian	1.7%	10	1.8%	13
Native American	0.2%	1	0.7%	5
Pacific Islander	0%	0	0.1%	1
Other	0.8%	5	1%	8

Procedure

Following Institutional Review Board approval, this study was conducted via survey methodology with a sample compiled from an alumni database provided by university alumni services. The random sample of athlete and non-athlete graduates was attained via a random number generator, which populated a spreadsheet containing graduates with known email addresses. Once the contact information was attained and organized, the survey was distributed to each participant via email with consent information embedded within the survey itself. A mailer with the link to the survey was also sent out a week after the initial email with a small gift (scratchpad) bearing the institution's logo. This mailer served as a reminder and thank you for considering participation in the study. This method is consistent with the principle of reciprocity to maximize survey response (Cialdini, 2006; Fehr et al., 2002).

Design and Measures

Participants completed reliable and valid instruments of study variables (i.e., HRQoL, social support, perceived stress, life satisfaction). Measures are outlined in

detail below.

Demographic Information. Participants were asked to self-report their college athlete vs. non-college athlete status, gender, race/ethnicity, whether they sustained a concussion during their collegiate sport career, whether they sustained a career (i.e., sport) ending injury, and whether they participated in a revenue generating sport (i.e., men's basketball or football).

Health-Related Quality of Life. Health-related quality of life was assessed with the 29-item PROMIS-29, a National Institutes of Health Roadmap Initiative to create and validate a comprehensive instrument to measure HRQoL. The PROMIS-29 includes seven subscales (i.e., anxiety, physical function problems, depression, fatigue, sleep disturbance, social roles difficulty, pain) with four items per subscale plus one pain intensity item (Cella et al., 2010; DeWalt et al., 2007; Fries et al., 2005; Reeve et al., 2007). The PROMIS-29 assesses these subscales with 4-items per subscale using a 5-point Likert-scale from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). Previous research has shown scores from this measure to exhibit acceptable internal consistency, reliability and validity in college athlete and non-athlete populations (Simon & Docherty, 2014). Internal consistency reliability of scores ranged from $\alpha = .81$ to .94 for subscales in the current study.

Social Support. Social support was assessed using the 6-item Enhancing Recovery in Coronary Heart Disease Social Support Instrument (ENRICHD-SSI). The ENRICHD-SSI assesses emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal social support (Mitchell et al., 2003) using a 5-point Likert-scale with responses ranging from 1 (*none of the time*) to 5 (a*ll of the time*). Previous research has shown scores from this measure to exhibit acceptable internal consistency, reliability and validity in college student populations (Certain et al., 2009). Internal consistency reliability of scores was $\alpha = .89$ for the current study.

Perceived Stress. Perceived psychological stress was assessed using the 4-item Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-4). The PSS-4 assesses how stressful respondents find their lives rather than measuring responses to a specific stressor (Cohen et al., 1983), using a 5-point Likert-scale with responses ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*). Previous research has shown PSS-4 scores to exhibit acceptable internal consistency, reliability and validity in college athlete populations (DeFreese & Smith, 2014). Internal consistency reliability of scores was $\alpha = .77$ for the current study.

Life Satisfaction. Life satisfaction was assessed using the 5-item Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS-5). It assesses global judgments of life satisfaction (Pavot & Diener, 2008) using a 7-point Likert-scale with responses ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Previous research has shown SWLS-5 scores to exhibit acceptable internal consistency, reliability and validity in college athlete populations (DeFreese & Smith, 2014). Internal consistency reliability of scores was $\alpha = .91$ for the current study.

Data Analysis

Following data screening, descriptive statistics were calculated for all study variables. Multicollinearity was examined using the variance inflation factors with a 10-point cut-off (Hair et al., 1998). Study hypotheses regarding differences between former college athletes and non-athletes were tested using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) in three individual models including concussion history, career ending injury, and revenue sport status. Gender was included as the third variable in all three models. Main effects results are presented in Tables 2-4.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Participants reported relatively good scores on all HRQoL domains (anxiety, M = 6.00, SD = 2.52; physical function problems, M = 4.46, SD = 1.59; depression, M = 5.10, SD = 2.19; fatigue, M = 7.74, SD = 3.30; sleep disturbance, M = 10.62, SD = 1.55; social roles difficulty, M = 6.63, SD = 3.14; pain, M = 5.33, SD = 2.50), social support (M = 25.45, SD = 4.50), perceived stress (M = 8.37, SD = 2.79) and life satisfaction (M = 27.76, SD = 5.99). Variables were correlated in expected directions. Independent samples t-tests (i.e., univariate results) revealed former collegiate athletes to report significantly higher social support and life satisfaction but also significantly lower depression, fatigue, and social roles difficulty compared to non-athletes.

Results for Athlete Status, Concussion History and Gender

For the MANOVA model examining collegiate athlete status, concussion history, and gender, no three-way (Wilk's Lambda = 1.12, p = .34) or two-way interactions were significant (athlete status*concussion history; Wilk's Lambda = 1.41, p = .17; athlete status*gender; Wilk's Lambda = 0.94, p = .50; concussion history*gender; Wilk's Lambda = 0.54, p = .86) for this multivariate model. Main effects of athlete status (Wilk's Lambda = 2.60, p = .004, partial eta squared = .022), concussion history (Wilk's Lambda = 2.23, p = .014, partial eta squared = .019), and gender (Wilk's Lambda = 2.25, p = .014, partial eta squared = .019) were significant. Between-subjects follow-up tests showed these effects to be significant for athlete status for the outcome variables of social roles difficulty (F = 5.42, p = .020) and life satisfaction (F = 9.85, p = .002), for concussion history for the outcome variables of physical function problems (F = 7.57, p = .006) and social support (F = 4.24, p = .040), and for gender for the outcome variables of fatigue (F = 9.74, p < .001) and sleep disturbance (F = 4.95, p = .026). For athlete status, former athletes reported significantly higher life satisfaction and lower social roles difficulty than non-athletes. For concussion history, those reporting at least one prior concussion reported significantly more physical function problems and higher social support than those with no concussion history. For gender, women reported significantly higher fatigue and sleep disturbance than men sampled.

Table 2

Main Effect Results for MANOVA by Athlete Status, Concussion History, and Gender

	Athletes			Non-Athletes			0 Concussions			≥ 1 Concussions			Female			Male		
Variable	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*
1. Anxiety	522	5.82	.19	669	5.90	.26	1099	5.99	.08	92	5.73	.32	570	6.00	.27	621	5.72	.18
2. Physical Function Problems	522	4.59	.12	669	4.75	.16	1099	4.41**	.05	92	4.94**	.19	570	4.65	.16	621	4.70	.11
3. Depression	522	4.76	.17	669	5.02	.23	1099	5.13	.07	92	4.65	.28	570	4.93	.24	621	4.84	.16
4. Fatigue	522	7.63	.25	669	8.36	.34	1099	7.79	.10	92	8.20	.41	570	8.65**	.35	621	7.34**	.23
5. Sleep Disturbance	522	10.77	.12	669	10.88	.16	1099	10.63	.05	92	11.00	.19	570	11.04*	.17	621	10.60*	.11
6. Social Roles Difficulty	522	6.21*	.24	669	7.14*	.32	1099	6.61	.10	92	6.74	.39	570	6.95	.33	621	6.40	.22
7. Pain	522	5.45	.19	669	5.70	.26	1099	5.30	.08	92	5.85	.31	570	5.55	.27	621	5.59	.18
8. Social Support	522	25.88	.34	669	26.15	.47	1099	25.42*	.14	92	26.61*	.56	570	26.37	.48	621	25.65	.32
9. Perceived Stress	522	8.09	.21	669	8.15	.29	1099	8.38	.09	92	7.85	.35	570	8.22	.30	621	8.02	.20
10. Life Satisfaction	522	29.20**	.45	669	26.84**	.61	1099	27.86	.18	92	28.18	.73	570	28.17	.63	621	27.87	.42

Notes. $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$

Table 3

Main Effect Results for MANOVA by Athlete Status, Career Ending Injury History, and Gender

	Athletes			Non-Athletes			Injury			No Injury			Female			Male		
Variable	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*
1. Anxiety	534	5.92	.17	425	6.26	.29	86	6.28	.32	873	5.91	.08	391	6.34	.27	568	5.85	.19
2. Physical Function Problems	534	4.81	.11	425	4.85	.19	86	5.28***	.21	873	4.38***	.06	391	4.66	.18	568	5.00	.13
3. Depression	534	5.04	.14	425	5.30	.25	86	5.33	.27	873	5.01	.07	391	5.06	.23	568	5.28	.17
4. Fatigue	534	7.89	.21	425	8.47	.36	86	8.67*	.41	873	7.69*	.11	391	8.87**	.34	568	7.48**	.25
5. Sleep Disturbance	534	10.66	.10	425	10.45	.18	86	10.48	.20	873	10.63	.05	391	10.73	.17	568	10.38	.12
6. Social Roles Difficulty	534	6.62	.21	425	7.76	.36	86	7.81**	.40	873	6.56**	.11	391	7.44	.34	568	6.94	.24
7. Pain	534	5.74	.17	425	5.99	.29	86	6.52***	.33	873	5.22***	.09	391	5.81	.27	568	5.93	.20
8. Social Support	534	26.12	.31	425	24.94	.53	86	25.46	.59	873	25.60	.15	391	25.61	.50	568	25.45	.36
9. Perceived Stress	534	8.25	.19	425	8.63	.32	86	8.56	.36	873	8.31	.09	391	8.56	.30	568	8.31	.22
10. Life Satisfaction	534	28.30	.39	425	27.39	.68	86	27.56	.76	873	28.13	.20	391	28.57	.63	568	27.12	.46

Notes. $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$.

Results for Athlete Status, Career Ending Injury, and Gender

For the MANOVA model examining collegiate athlete status, career ending injury history, and gender, no three-way (Wilk's Lambda = 1.45, $p = .16$) or two-way interactions were significant (athlete status*career ending injury history; Wilk's Lambda = 0.55, $p = .86$; athlete status*gender; Wilk's Lambda = 1.49, $p = .14$; career ending injury history*gender; Wilk's Lambda = 1.60, $p = .10$) for this multivariate model. Main effects of career ending history (Wilk's Lambda = 2.21, $p =$. 016, partial eta squared = .023) and gender (Wilk's Lambda = 3.40, $p <$. 001, partial eta squared = .035), but not athlete status (Wilk's Lambda = 1.06, $p = .39$, partial eta squared = .011), were significant. Between-subjects follow-up tests showed these effects to be significant for career ending injury history for the outcome variables of physical function problems ($F = 16.98$, $p < .001$), fatigue ($F = 5.37$, $p = .021$), social roles difficulty ($F = 9.03$, $p = .003$), and pain ($F = 15.00$, $p < .001$), and for gender for the outcome variable of fatigue ($F = 10.92$, $p = .001$). For career ending injury history, those reporting a career ending injury reported significantly higher physical function problems, fatigue, social roles difficulty, and pain than those not reporting a career ending injury. For gender, men reported significantly higher pain than the women sampled. As the multivariate main effect was not significant, between-subject effects for athlete status were not probed.

Results for Athlete Status, Revenue Sport Status, and Gender

For the MANOVA model examining collegiate athlete status, revenue sport status, and gender, no three-way (Wilk's Lambda = 0.70, $p = .73$) or two-way interactions were significant (athlete status*revenue sport status; Wilk's Lambda = 1.57, $p = .11$; athlete status*gender; Wilk's Lambda = 0.92, $p = .52$; revenue sport status*gender; Wilk's Lambda = 0.67, $p = .75$) for this multivariate model. Main effects of revenue sport status (Wilk's Lambda = 3.72, $p <$. 001, partial eta squared = .030) and gender (Wilk's Lambda = 3.49, $p <$. 001, partial eta squared = .028), but not athlete status (Wilk's Lambda = 1.58, $p = .11$, partial eta squared = .013), were also significant for the multivariate model. Between-subjects follow-up tests showed these effects to be significant for revenue sport status for the outcome variables of physical function problems ($F = 29.23$, $p < .001$) and pain ($F = 13.09$, $p < .001$), and for gender for the outcome variables of anxiety ($F = 4.81$, $p = .028$), physical function problems ($F = 6.22$, $p = .013$), fatigue ($F = 16.60$, $p < .001$), and social roles difficulty ($F = 4.56$, $p = .033$). For revenue sport status, former revenue sport athletes reported significantly higher physical function problems and pain than those not participating in revenue sports. For gender, women significantly reported higher anxiety, physical function problems, fatigue, and social roles difficulty than men sampled. As the multivariate main effect was not significant, between-subject effects for athlete status were not probed.

Table 4

Main Effect Results for MANOVA by Athlete Status, Revenue Sport Status, and Gender

	Athletes			Non-Athletes			Revenue			Non-Revenue			Female			Male		
Variable	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*n*	*M*	*SD*
1. Anxiety	536	6.08	.21	677	5.96	.16	216	6.03	.25	997	6.00	.08	579	6.30*	.24	634	5.73*	.11
2. Physical Function Problems	536	4.95	.12	677	4.62	.10	216	5.21***	.15	997	4.36***	.05	579	4.98*	.14	634	4.59*	.07
3. Depression	536	5.09	.18	677	5.14	.14	216	5.11	.22	997	5.13	.07	579	5.28	.21	634	4.96	.10
4. Fatigue	536	7.66	.26	677	8.11	.21	216	7.96	.32	997	7.80	.11	579	8.57***	.31	634	7.20***	.14
5. Sleep Disturbance	536	10.55	.12	677	10.62	.10	216	10.50	.15	997	10.66	.05	579	10.68	.14	634	10.49	.07
6. Social Roles Difficulty	536	6.45	.25	677	6.94	.20	216	6.76	.31	997	6.63	.10	579	7.04*	.29	634	6.35*	.14
7. Pain	536	5.84	.20	677	5.55	.16	216	6.16***	.25	997	5.23***	.08	579	5.84	.23	634	5.55	.11
8. Social Support	536	25.81	.36	677	25.46	.29	216	25.79	.44	997	25.48	.15	579	26.00	.42	634	25.28	.20
9. Perceived Stress	536	8.25	.23	677	8.41	.18	216	8.31	.27	997	8.35	.09	579	8.37	.26	634	8.29	.12
10. Life Satisfaction	536	27.97	.48	677	27.45	.38	216	27.39	.58	997	28.03	.19	579	28.07	.55	634	27.35	.26

Notes. $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$.

Discussion

Largely supporting study hypotheses, results suggest that for nearly all study outcomes (with the exception of social roles difficulty and life satisfaction in models controlling for concussion history), former collegiate athletes reported no significant differences on HRQoL or psychological outcomes when compared to their sampled non-athlete peers. Broadly, this suggests the experience of collegiate athletics on those sampled was similar or better than that of their non-athlete peers. Importantly, sport environments are not a homogeneous exposure and athlete experiences through sport—rather than sport as a unitary exposure—explained variability between athletes as well as in comparison to their non-athlete peers. Accordingly, when we explored further we found less positive HRQoL outcomes among athletes endorsing self-report concussion, career ending injury, and revenue sport participation histories. These findings align with previous studies finding positive health and well-being effects (i.e., not significantly different or better than comparison positions) for former collegiate athletes (e.g., Houston et al., 2016, Kerr et al., 2014) and suggest these variables as important effect modifiers. Study strengths include a relatively large cross-sectional sample including graduates in cohorts 10, 20, 30, and 40 years post-graduation. Bolstered by these strengths, study findings extend the Health through Sport Conceptual Model (Eime et al., 2013) to a new context of collegiate athletics.

Extending previous research, HRQoL and psychosocial markers of social roles difficulty and life satisfaction were the only outcomes which differed significantly across athlete and non-athlete groups and only in one of the three multivariate models examined. Moreover, former collegiate athletes and non-athletes sampled did not differ significantly on any other health and well-being markers. Further, former athletes reported more positive or comparable levels on all variables assessed relative to their former college student comparison group. These findings were somewhat in contrast to a previous study by Simon and Docherty (2014), which found nearly opposite findings relative to athletes versus non-athletes sampled. It is possible study differences could have resulted from variances in sampling procedures or sample populations. Specifically, Simon and Docherty (2014) included an athlete comparison group of students who were active in recreational activity, club, or intramural sport while the current study included a random sample of all university graduates. Differences in university and athletics department culture and resources between the two one-school samples could also play a factor. Additionally, unique environmental exposures during sport participation and/or post-career psychosocial experiences largely exclusive to individual former athletes could also contribute to study finding differences. Previous work suggests current collegiate athletes' social experiences are influenced by athletic identity development (Chen et al., 2010), a concept that may resonate beyond career completion, explaining potential differences in study findings from previous work. Accordingly, future research in this area should examine athletic identity as a potential mechanism for HRQOL and psychosocial well-being differences among former athletes.

Current theory on athlete retirement or transition suggests the plausibility of current study findings given athletes' overall psychological response to the social environment following career termination (Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994). Yet, it is also possible that these findings reflect self-selection into sport by youth athletes with better psychosocial functioning, or differential attrition at younger ages by youth with less optimal psychosocial functioning (Eime et al., 2013). Future work is needed which tests these dueling assertions for adaptive versus maladaptive lifespan outcomes for former collegiate athletes via the use of prospective study designs examining former athlete psychosocial experience before, during, and after the transition from college sport. Theoretical integration of the Health through Sport Conceptual Model and theory on athlete transition represents a fruitful lens to inform such future research efforts. Altogether, continued longitudinal work in this area is needed to probe study findings across additional former athlete samples, with a focus on determining how sport exposure influences psychosocial health and well-being outcomes over time as well as examining the complex interplay of factors which underpin differences in former collegiate athletes from their non-athlete peers. Such future work may benefit from examining potentially important moderators of the association of collegiate athlete status with HRQoL variables. Based on the main effect findings of the current study, moderators may include athlete injury histories and/or gender. Importantly, study findings are limited by our binary assessment of gender. Future work may benefit from probing gender expression beyond binary categories.

Despite some positive associations with sport participation revealed in main effects findings, unique physical, psychological, and social deficits were revealed relative to some exploratory demographic variables. Specifically, those sampled who reported a history of concussion endorsed more physical function problems as well as higher social support (possibly from requirements to reach out for medical services or interpersonal support to address challenges in activities of daily living) than their sampled non-injury counterparts. Those who reported a career ending injury reported more physical function problems, fatigue, social roles difficulty, and pain than their peers not endorsing this experience. Additionally, revenue sport athletes (i.e., basketball and football) reported more physical function problems and pain than those not exposed to this highly competitive and commercial environment. Finally, women in the sample reported worse HRQoL (as exemplified by higher levels of anxiety, physical function problems, fatigue, and social roles difficulty) than men. Based on study results, it appears that these key sport-based injury experiences and environmental exposures have important implications for the HRQoL outcomes of former collegiate athletes. Such findings shine light on the idea that the exposures of college sport, to the extent they result in serious injuries, could not only blunt potential benefits of this experience, but may also precipitate negative health and well-being in later-life. Findings also indicate the need for additional targeted research to understand the experiences of former female and revenue sport athletes, given evidence of heightened psychosocial deficits post-career relative to their peers. Such work could be supplemented by more intensive injury and participation histories as well as qualitative methods to further probe how these negative sport experiences may lead to lifespan HRQoL outcomes.

Study findings have implications for sport psychology consultants and/or practitioners working with former collegiate athletes as they transition from sport to their post-athletic careers. Despite the potential for positive HRQoL and psychosocial outcomes (or no difference from non-athlete populations) following collegiate sport participation, it is clear that adaptive post-sport experiences vary across individual athlete cases and that concussion, injury, revenue sport status, and/or gender identity may mitigate these benefits for some former collegiate athletes. Therefore, targeted, psychoeducational intervention efforts may help athletes address social roles in the transition from sport and more effectively manage mental and physical challenges resulting from sport injury. A focus on healthy ways to process athletic identity may represent a high impact practice for practitioners (e.g., student-athlete development staff, sport administrators, sport psychologists) to consider in their respective duties. This supports a recent medical position statement calling for the need to support the detection and management of athlete mental health at all levels of participation including during transition (Chang et al., 2019).

These results challenge us to think critically about how sport exposures can be changed to limit the potential for unhealthy post-collegiate practices. Specifically, injury reduction efforts at a policy or institutional level and efforts to help athletes retain or construct more well-rounded identities while in college may be helpful upstream approaches to prevention. Based on study findings, such interventions may have unique benefits when specifically designed for female athletes, revenue sport athletes, athletes experiencing a career ending injury, and/or athletes with concussion histories. This may be particularly useful because, though strong guidelines exist to support college athlete mental health during their careers (NCAA, 2016a), few collegiate athletes have the same access to athletic department resources to support their physical (e.g., nutrition, strength training, medical services), psychological (e.g., psychological services) and social (e.g., supportive social network) health and functioning following their collegiate playing careers.

Limitations

Despite novel contributions of the current cross-sectional study to the former athlete literature, there are clear limitations to its generalizability and follow-up; prospective research is needed to validate and extend study conclusions. While the sample was appropriate for specific study research questions, it poses a limitation on the ability to generalize these findings to a broader sample of athletes and non-athletes from Division I Power Five or other divisions within intercollegiate athletics. Additionally, drawing participants from a population of graduates delimits athletes and non-athletes who did not graduate – a vulnerable population who may have chosen to discontinue school because of injury, academic or psychosocial issues. For that reason, future research should include non-graduates in order to uncover potential sub-population trends. Moreover, given potential racial disparities in the mental health experiences of African-American student-athletes (Wilkerson et al., 2020), future study designs would benefit from comparing the experiences of former athletes by race/ethnicity.

For study variables that were significantly different across former athlete versus non-athletes sampled, the more positive response was endorsed by the former athlete sample suggesting potential benefits of the collegiate athlete experience on lifespan health and well-being. However, caution is also warranted in interpreting these findings; as suggested by the non-significant effects found in other multivariate models investigated, the practical significance of the univariate differences across study groups (i.e., athletes versus non-athletes) and associated measures of model effect size were moderate at best. Finally, we think that the cohort-based design of the current study is appropriate for our research questions but also represents an important delimitation of the current work. Specifically, the present study design prevents causal inferences on whether results are attributable to athletics participation or whether the performance-driven environment of collegiate athletics may attract and/or select individuals with healthier life trajectories (e.g., healthy worker effect; Goodger et al., 2007). Consequently, prospective research designs would afford opportunities to build on the current findings and make stronger inferences about former collegiate athlete health and well-being across the post-sport transition. Such work would be dually beneficial as it would also minimize recall biases associated with retrospective, self-report designs.

Conclusions

This study adds to the knowledge base on former collegiate athlete health and well-being by indicating some positive post-athletic career HRQoL and psychosocial outcomes of former NCAA Division I Power Five collegiate athletes compared to their non-athlete student peers. Results also extend the Health through Sport Conceptual Model to a new context of collegiate athletics. That said, perhaps the most important takeaway from this study was further substantiation of the fact that sport is not a homogeneous exposure. While overall there may be some positive correlates of participation such as lower levels of social roles difficulty and greater levels of life satisfaction, different sport-related exposures may variably impact the association between sport participation and outcomes. Namely, concussion and career ending injury histories, revenue sport participation status, and gender identity appear to be important sport environmental factors with potential to mitigate positive (for former athletes) findings.

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"I learned that sports teaches rape culture": Assessing Sexual Violence Prevention Education for Intercollegiate Athletes

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In fall 2018, 81 intercollegiate athletes participated in *Fair Play: Sexual Violence Prevention for Athletes.* This study aimed to assess the efficacy of the *Fair Play* curriculum and facilitation, specifically learning if athletes' attitudes toward women and/or rape myth acceptance changed as a result of their participation in *Fair Play*. Athletes completed pre- and post-test surveys to measure perceptions of sexual assault/rape myth acceptance and gender. In addition, 20 athletes participated in semi-structured qualitative interviews to further explain their knowledge of sexual violence after completing *Fair Play*. Survey results showed significant differences for pre- and post-test scores on rape myth acceptance, but not for attitudes toward women. Interview results showed that *Fair Play* participants could articulate a raised awareness of sexual violence, appropriately define sexual violence and consent, and reject rape myths. Implications include further understanding of effective rape prevention education.

Keywords: sexual violence, intercollegiate athletics, rape prevention education

Introduction

Sexual violence on college campuses is an issue of concern due to steady incidence rates despite increased public attention on the matter. In 2000, it was estimated that between one-fifth and one-quarter of college women had experienced attempted or completed rape (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000); in 2007, the Campus Sexual Assault Study found similar results, reporting that one in five female undergraduate students were victims of attempted or completed rape (Krebs et al., 2007). In 2015, the numbers remained consistent at 20% to 25% of women experiencing sexual violence on campus (Anderson & Clement, 2015; Cantor et al., 2017). In response to these numbers, the Office for Civil Rights updated the agency's interpretation of Title IX to include mandated sexual assault response and prevention efforts by universities (Ali, 2011). One such way universities meet these requirements is through prevention education programs, whether online courses or in-person information sessions (Howard, 2015; Zimmerman, 2016).

It is critical to define a phenomenon in order to study it. Sexual violence may be difficult to define as it is a non-legal umbrella term that encompasses rape, sexual assault, and sexual harassment. The Department of Justice defines rape as "the penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim" (Department of Justice, 2012). In addition, the Department of Justice (n.d.) defines sexual assault as any type of sexual conduct or behavior that occurs without explicit consent. Forcible sodomy, fondling, and attempted rape all fall under this definition of sexual assault (Department of Justice, n.d.). In the present study, the focus is on rape and sexual assault, as well as the prevention of these forms of sexual violence.

One area of focus for sexual violence prevention education efforts has been intercollegiate athletics. Intercollegiate athletic departments are uniquely positioned to impact the sexual culture of college campuses, for better or worse. Further complicating the definition of sexual violence, the literature on sexual violence and sport includes more than simply examining the link between participation in athletics and perpetrating sexual violence, but also includes the relationship between sports participation and sexually aggressive attitudes or rape-normative beliefs, which are risk factors for sexual violence perpetration. Studies have found male collegiate athletes to be more prone to rape myth acceptance and sexually aggressive attitudes than their non-athlete peers (Boeringer 1996, 1999; Koss & Gaines, 1993; Murnen & Kohlman, 2007; Sawyer et al., 2002; Young et al., 2017), and some studies have found athletes more likely to be perpetrators of sexual assault (Crosset et al., 1996; Fritner & Rubinson, 1993; Sawyer et al., 2002).

As a whole, this body of research suggests that those participating in sport may be more sexually violent, but one should be cautioned that these studies do not definitively prove that athletes rape at a higher rate than non-athletes. Still, data from the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) indicated male athletes want more education and discussion on "how to speak up when you see things around you aren't right" (i.e., bystander intervention) and both male and female athletes wanted to learn more about how to conduct themselves "appropriately" on campus and in the community (e.g., interpersonal communication, healthy relationships; Bell & Wilfert, 2014). As such, more effective sexual violence prevention education is needed specifically targeting intercollegiate athletics. NCAA policy does require that coaches, student-athletes, and athletic administrators complete sexual violence prevention training each year (NCAA, 2020). Further, athletic departments must confirm they are "informed on and compliant with school policies regarding sexual violence prevention and proper adjudication and resolution of acts of sexual violence to be eligible to host NCAA championships" (NCAA, 2020, para. 6). However, the governing body does not provide additional details for athletic departments and allows for a variety of educational programs to satisfy this requirement.

Given the limited guidance provided by the NCAA, as well as the critical need to address sexual violence, the primary researcher of this study developed an athlete-centered, 10-hour curriculum, *Fair Play: Sexual Violence Prevention for Athletes,* which blends research targeted at athletes with the best practices of a public

health approach to sexual violence prevention, providing an expanded curriculum employing active learning methodologies (McCray, 2015). Distributing 10 hours of training over multiple sessions, *Fair Play* provides students with an expanded sexual violence prevention curriculum featuring active learning methodologies that are more effective in educating athletes specifically (Banyard et al., 2007). The program emphasizes four curricular components: (1) awareness and understanding of sexual assault, consent, and rape culture in sports; (2) healthy sex education, (3) gender and sexuality; and (4) bystander intervention (including risk reduction for potential victims). Basic awareness, risk reduction, and bystander intervention are typical topics in sexual violence education. Healthy sexuality, however, is both less common and critical to programmatic success because, according to Herman (1984), "as long as sex in our society is construed as a dirty, low, and violent act involving domination of a male over a female, rape will remain a common occurrence" (p. 52). Further, the inclusion of gender and sexuality is key, because helping athletes reimagine gender roles may contribute to lowering negative attitudes towards women and reducing rape myth acceptance.

Fair Play offers separate sessions for male and female athletes as research indicates sex-segregated training is more effective (Anderson & Whiston, 2005; Berkowitz, 2002; Breitenbecher, 2000; Jackson & Davis, 2000), in part because men often become defensive in the presence of women (Brecklin & Forde, 2001; Rozee & Koss, 2001). Thus, educating with same-sex instructors will ensure receptive audiences for what may be difficult material. *Fair Play* sessions are solely focused on sexual violence prevention, rather than offered in combination with other subjects (e.g., alcohol abuse, nutrition, compliance), as Anderson and Whiston (2005) demonstrated that "programs that included more than one topic appeared to be less effective than more focused programs" (p. 383). This model achieves an intense "saturation" effect, which is more effective with sexual violence prevention and bystander intervention techniques (Anderson & Whiston, 2005; Flores & Hartlaub, 1998). *Fair Play* is a step-by-step 10-hour curriculum that offers athletes a unique opportunity to engage in a program designed specifically for them.

In fall 2018, four athletic teams from a private university participated in *Fair Play: Sexual Violence Prevention for Athletes.* The university received local grant funding to pilot *Fair Play* and assess the program's outcomes related to athlete understanding of sexual violence. Thus, the purpose of this study was to assess the efficacy of the *Fair Play* curriculum and facilitation. More specifically, we sought to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Did athletes' attitudes toward women change as a result of participation in *Fair Play*?
RQ2: Did athletes' rape myth acceptance change as a result of participation in *Fair Play*?
RQ3: How was *Fair Play* effective in changing athletes' understanding of sexual violence?

RQ1 and RQ2 were influence by the extant literature on rape culture, rape myths, and how they may be utilized to reduce incidences of sexual violence. The next section will outline these issues, particularly as they relate to athletic participation.

Theoretical Framework

Sanday (1981) first coined the term "rape culture" in her anthropological work, positing rape is a not a biological need, but something that occurs as a result of socialization. Herman (1984) expanded on this term while discussing rape in America: "To end rape, people must be able to envision a relationship between the sexes that involves sharing, warmth, and equality, and to bring about a social system in which those values are fostered" (p. 52). Rape cultures are characterized by high levels of tolerance for violence, and strict sex segregation and gender roles, which foster lack of respect for women. Critical to fostering a rape culture are rape myths. According to Burt (1980), these are "stereotypes and myths – defined as prejudicial, stereotyped, or false beliefs about rape, rape victims, and rapists – in creating a climate hostile to rape victims" (p. 217). Examples of rape myths are "look at how she was dressed, she was asking for it" or "he couldn't help himself, he's a guy just following his sexual urges, what do you expect?" Rape myths include stereotypes about both victims and perpetrators but hold only the victim accountable for the sexual assault (Burt, 1980). Lonsway and Fitzgerald (1994) noted that rape myths are "attitudes and beliefs that are generally false but are widely and persistently held, and that serve to deny and justify male sexual aggression against women" (p. 134).

Rape myths often uphold traditional views on sex, gender and masculinity (e.g., women are to be pure and chaste, men are celebrated for sexual conquest). Burt's (1980) findings indicated rape myth acceptance is "strongly connected to other deeply held and pervasive attitudes such as sex role stereotyping, distrust of the opposite sex (adversarial sexual beliefs), and acceptance of interpersonal violence" (p. 229). In sum, rape myths and their acceptance contribute to a culture that is supportive of rape (i.e., a rape culture).

Thus, rape cultures (1) "display a high level of tolerance for violence, male dominance, and sexual segregation" and (2) "lack the social constraints that discourage sexual aggression or contain social arrangements that encourage it" (Crosset, 1999, p. 245). Further, some facets of American higher education, such as intercollegiate athletics, are often considered to be rape cultures or display elements of rape culture (McCray et al., 2018; Sanday, 1990). Curry (2002) further exposed rape culture in intercollegiate athletics through an examination of locker room talk. He found that locker room talk about women "promotes harmful attitudes and creates an environment supportive of sexual assault and rape" (p. 183). Messner and Sabo (1994) connected locker room talk to peer support of violence:

> And when verbal sparring and bragging about sexual conquests led to actual behavior, peer group values encouraged these young men to treat females as objects of conquest. This sort of masculine peer group dynamic is at the heart of what feminists have called "the rape culture." (p. 50)

Peer support of violence is cited as one of the main reasons for acting in a sexually aggressive way. According to Schwartz and DeKeseredy (1997), "North America is a 'rape-supportive culture,' where values and beliefs that support and encourage the sexual victimization of women are widely available to all men" (p. 52). However, simply because someone supports rape myths does not necessarily mean they will act upon those beliefs. Schwartz and DeKeseredy proposed perpetrators of sexual assault do so based on perceived peer support for violence against women.

Further, as sport is a patriarchal, sex segregated system it provides male athletes with power and privilege over women (Hattery, 2010) and has "historically been characterized through male hegemony" (Mordecai, 2017, p. 37). Male athletes are socialized through a culture that encourages them to take on a hypermasculine identity with a heightened sense of aggression and sexuality (Mordecai, 2017). It is also one where winning a sport competition is done through the "use of violence to achieve domination over others" (Messner et al., 2015, p. 11) in a manner that parallels men's violence against women (Mordecai, 2017). Further exacerbating these issues is the fact that male athletes may experience entitlement (e.g., the assumption of "celebrity status") through their sport participation, which can contribute to an inflated ego and sense of invincibility that may impact their decision making (Coakley, 2015).

As mentioned, some literature suggests that male college athletes are more prone to rape myth acceptance and sexually aggressive attitudes than their non-athlete peers (Boeringer 1996, 1999; Koss & Gaines, 1993; Murnen & Kohlman, 2007; Sawyer et al., 2002; Young et al., 2016), therefore, one goal of *Fair Play: Sexual Violence Prevention for Athletes* was to lower participants' rape myth acceptance (RQ2). Further, as rape culture and rape myths are based on negative and harmful gendered stereotypes about women, a second goal of *Fair Play* was to change participants' attitudes towards women in more positive, less stereotypical gendered ways (RQ1). Lastly, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), it is important that prevention programs "promote social norms that protect against violence" and "teach skills to prevent sexual violence" (Basile et al., 2016, p. 11). This includes treating men and boys as allies, teaching empowerment-based skills to women and girls, and educating all young people on healthy sexuality and dating/relationship skills, such as consent. *Fair Play* encompassed these components, which we attempt to demonstrate through RQ3.

Methods

IRB approval was secured from the primary researcher's institution. A mixed-methods approach was utilized to understand whether or not and how/why attitudes regarding sexual assault/rape myth acceptance and gender roles changed as a result of *Fair Play*. It is important to understand the effectiveness of this sexual violence prevention programming specific for intercollegiate athletes as athletic departments have struggled to comply with recommendations from the OCR regarding

action taken against sexual assault on college campuses (Kelderman, 2012; Krakauer, 2015; Luther, 2016). Researchers were interested in understanding not only if changes occurred but how and why they occurred, which is why a mixed-methods approach was utilized. Paper and pencil surveys were utilized for data collection of pre- and post-program perceptions of athletes' attitudes regarding sexual assault/rape myth acceptance and gender roles. The utilization of pre- and post-program data collection allowed researchers to measure change in attitudes (Foubert & Marriott, 1997; Weisz & Black, 2001). Quantitative data (i.e., survey responses) was entered into SPSS version 25 by the primary researcher. Following the completion of *Fair Play*, athletes were invited to voluntarily participate in qualitative interviews with the primary researcher.

Participants

Four athletic teams (i.e., football, softball, women's golf, women's tennis) participated in *Fair Play*, as selected by the institution's athletic director based on team schedule and availability during the time of the pilot study. Athletes were instructed that the *Fair Play* programming was mandatory, though not all students were able to participate (e.g., they had class at the same time as *Fair Play*), and though attendance was taken, there were no penalties for missing a session (e.g., coach did not make them run). A grant paid for trained sexual violence prevention educators from a local nonprofit to facilitate the programming, so the primary researcher was only involved in distributing and collecting the surveys, as well as facilitating follow-up interviews. The separation of facilitators and researchers was done in an attempt to reduce the possibility of social desirability bias in participants.

Frequencies for the quantitative survey data indicated a relatively equal split between first (27.2%), second (27.2), and third year (29.6%) students, while 14.8% self-reported as fourth year students and 1.2% self-reported as fifth year or graduate students. Just over half the participants identified as men (55.6%). All 81 participants identified as heterosexual. The majority of the participants (85.2%) self-reported identifying as White, while 4.9% identified as Black or African American, 1.2% identified as Asian, 6.2% identified as Biracial or Mixed Race, and 2.5% identified as other. A little more than half (55.6%) of the participants indicated they participated in football, while 7.4% participated in women's golf, 12.3% participated in women's tennis, and 24.7% participated in softball. The participant demographics are representative of the overall athlete population at the institution. Twenty of the 81 student-athletes participated in follow-up interviews with the primary researcher. Of the 20 participants who completed interviews, 11 were football players, and the remaining nine were from the women's teams. Researchers aimed to interview a variety of student representation, including from all teams, all grade levels, and those who attended every session, as well as those who missed a few sessions. Please see Table 1 for a breakdown of interview participants.

Table 1

Interview Participants

	Sport	Year in School	Sessions Attended
Participant A	W Golf	1st/2nd	9 of 10
Participant B	Softball	1st/2nd	9 of 10
Participant C	W Golf	1st/2nd	10 of 10
Participant D	Football	1st/2nd	10 of 10
Participant E	Softball	1st/2nd	10 of 10
Participant F	W Tennis	3rd/4th	9 of 10
Participant G	W Golf	3rd/4th	9 of 10
Participant H	Football	3rd/4th	10 of 10
Participant I	Football	3rd/4th	10 of 10
Participant J	Softball	3rd/4th	8 of 10
Participant K	Football	3rd/4th	10 of 10
Participant L	Football	1st/2nd	8 of 10
Participant M	W Tennis	3rd/4th	9 of 10
Participant N	Football	1st/2nd	8 of 10
Participant O	Football	1st/2nd	8 of 10
Participant P	Football	1st/2nd	10 of 10
Participant Q	Football	3rd/4th	10 of 10
Participant R	Football	3rd/4th	7 of 10
Participant S	Softball	3rd/4th	10 of 10
Participant T	Football	3rd/4th	10 of 10

Measures

To measure athletes' perceptions of sexual assault/rape myth acceptance, the Acceptance of Modern Myths about Sexual Aggression scale (AMMSA; Gerger et al., 2007) was utilized. The AMMSA was created in response to problems associated with classic rape myth acceptance scales (e.g., the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale) and research conducted using college students. Gerger and colleagues (2007) found that when conducting research on college students utilizing rape myth acceptance scales a floor effect (i.e., skewed distributions and means distorted to the low endpoint of the scale) is often produced. The AMMSA is a 30-item scale that measures endorsement of common myths about rape and sexual aggression. The inventory utilizes a seven-point Likert scale ranging from "Completely disagree" to "Completely agree." Items include, "Once a man and women have started 'making out', a woman's misgivings against sex will automatically disappear," "Interpreting harmless gestures as 'sexual harassment' is a popular weapon in the battle of the sexes," and "After a rape, women nowadays receive ample support.' Alterations were made to question wording of several survey questions to ensure participants fully understood questions. For example, the question reading: "When a single woman invites a single man to her *flat* she signals that she is not averse to having sex," was

altered to: "When a single woman invites a single man to her *place* she signals that she is not averse to having sex." The intent was not to change the meaning of questions, but rather ensure language matched with common language utilized by intercollegiate athletes. Higher scores indicate a greater acceptance or endorsement of the rape myth. A Cronbach's alpha of .76 for the English version was found (Gerger et al., 2007). Adequate reliability and validity have been established in studies by the scale's authors (Gerger et al., 2007).

To measure athletes' perceptions of gender roles the shortened version of the Attitudes Toward Women scale (ATW; Spence et al., 1973) was used. The ATW scale was created to measure perceptions about "the rights and roles of women in such areas as vocational, educational, and intellectual activities; dating behavior and etiquette; sexual behavior; and marital relationships" (Spence et al., 1973, p. 219). The original ATW scale contains 55 items, while the shortened version utilized in this study contains 25. In creating the shortened version authors attempted to include statements that describe roles and behaviors from all major activity areas "in which normative expectations could be, in principle, the same for men and women" (Spence et al., 1973, p. 219). The traditional four-point Likert scale was altered to a seven-point scale to create uniformity between the ATW scale and AMMSA. Response options ranged from 1 "completely disagree" (i.e., traditional) to 7 "complete agree" (i.e., pro-feminist). Increasing the number of response options has been found to be better for reliability, validity, discriminating power, and respondent preferences (Preston & Colman, 2000). Sample items include, "Women should take increasing responsibility for leadership in solving the intellectual and social problems of the day," "Under modern economic conditions with women being active outside the home, men should share in household tasks such as washing dishes and doing the laundry," and "Women should worry less about their rights and more about becoming good wives and mothers." Wording for select questions was altered to ensure participants understood questions as common language and phrases have changed during the past 45 years. For example, the question reading: "Women should be given equal opportunity with men for *apprenticeship* in the various trades," was changed to: "Women should be given equal opportunity with men for *internships* in the various trades." Authors were careful to not alter the meaning of questions with the alterations. Correlations between the 55-item version and shorted version were .95 and above (Spence et al., 1973). Additional demographic information was also collected at the end of the survey. Post-test surveys also included three optional, open-ended questions: "What was the most impactful or meaningful part of *Fair Play*?"; "What improvements and/or suggestions do have for *Fair Play*?"; and "Is there anything else you'd like to share related to *Fair Play*?".

Semi-structured qualitative interview questions included two broad categories of questions: the curricular format and content delivery and knowledge of sexual violence and bystander intervention. Questions assessing the curricular format and content delivery included: "How interested and/or engaged did you feel during the 10-week program?"; "How did the program's structure help your learning?"; "How did the program's structure hinder your learning?"; "How did the program's

facilitator(s) help your learning?"; and "How did the program's facilitator(s) hinder your learning?" Questions assessing participant knowledge of sexual violence and bystander intervention included: "What did you learn during the program?"; "How would you define sexual violence? Sexual assault? Consent?"; "Please describe bystander intervention?"; "To what extent did the 10-week curriculum change your knowledge of sexual violence? Please describe the change."; and "To what extent did the 10-week curriculum change your knowledge of bystander invention? Please describe the change."

Analysis

In order to analyze the quantitative data collected, SPSS Statistics version 25 was utilized for data analysis. Only completed surveys were utilized in analysis. Of the 81 participants who completed the intervention, 80 completed the pre-test for a response rate of 98%. Additionally, 74 participants completed the post-test providing a response rate of 91%. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze mean scores of the AMMSA and ATW scale. Further, paired samples t-tests were conducted to test for changes between pre-and post-tests scores on the AMMSA and ATW scale. A series of t-tests and analysis of variances were utilized to examine the relationship between the AMMSA and ATW scale and demographic variables such as sex/gender, academic classification, and sport played.

Semi-structured, in-person interviews were conducted by the primary researcher with a purposive sample of athletes who participated in *Fair Play* (Creswell, 2013). Interviews were selected as the method of data collection to elicit the inner thoughts and experiences of those who participated in *Fair Play* (Seidman, 2013). Unlike quantitative data collection (e.g., surveys), qualitative interviews allow for a more personal interaction with participants, which empowers the participant to share additional details (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Additionally, researchers are able to use direct quotations from interviews conducted, which allows for a deeper understanding of the data and enable the athletes' voiced to be heard (Veal & Darcy, 2014). Specifically, researchers were interested in hearing participant voices to gain narrative insight to the effectiveness of *Fair Play*. For instance, participants may be able to tell the interviewer precisely how they defined consent or engaged in bystander intervention, and the interviewer can ask follow-up questions to gain further awareness of how *Fair Play* was effective in changing attitudes and behaviors.

Of the 81 athletes who participated in *Fair Play*, 20 completed interviews. The average interview length was 27 minutes (range 19-45 minutes). Length of interviews varied based on a number of factors, including pre- and post-test changes in participant perceptions, comfort level and openness of the participant, and content area knowledge. In addition, interviews were crafted to supplement quantitative survey data, which allows for a more concise interview guide. Post-test open ended survey questions were included in data analysis with interview data.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim by Rev.com (Zhou et al., 2013) and formatted for analysis by the primary researcher. Researchers individually coded each interview transcript and then came together as a research team to discuss codes

(Saldana, 2015). Constant comparative data analysis was utilized to code the data. During this analysis codes, or instances, from individual interviews were continuously compared to the rest of the data in an attempt to find patterns (Merriam, 2009). Through the reading and rereading of the coded data, themes were identified (Rice & Ezzy, 1999). "Meaningful and manageable themes" were created through grouping of quotes of related career progressions, experiences, or ideas (Patton, 1987, p. 150). Whenever possible, researchers utilized exact wording in attempts to retain and reflect the meaning (Creswell, 2013). Previous research has demonstrated the need for qualitative data to deliver context and expand upon quantitative assessment data for violence prevention programs (Edwards et al., 2005; Jaime et al., 2015; Piccigallo et al., 2012). The data analysis style used by the researchers in the current study (i.e., constant comparative analysis) is a commonly used method for analyzing qualitative interview data (Patton, 1987).

Results and Discussion

Pre- and post-test surveys answered RQ1 and RQ2. Specifically, the Attitudes Toward Women (ATW) scale addressed RQ1, and the Acceptance of Modern Myths about Sexual Assault (AMMSA) scaled addressed RQ2. Paired samples t-test indicated significant differences for pre- (M = 3.19, SD = .84) and post-test (M = 2.87, SD = .86) scores on the Acceptance of Modern Myths about Sexual Assault (AMMSA) scale, $t(61) = 4.195$, $p < .001$, $d = .54$. No significant differences were found between pre and post-test scores on the Attitudes Toward Women (ATW) scale. Independent samples t-tests indicated significant differences were found between male (M = 3.48, SD = .80) and female (M = 2.96, SD = .73) participants on the pre-test for the AMMSA scale, $t(74) = 2.911$, $p = .005$, $d = .68$. No additional gender differences were found on the post-test of the AMMSA scale or the pre- or post-test of the ATW scale.

No significant differences were found on the pre- or post-test for either scale based on academic year, race/ethnicity, or number of sessions attended. A one-way ANOVA indicated significant differences were found based on sport participation on the pre-test of the AMMSA scale, ($F(3, 72) = 5.016$, $p = .003$, $\eta_p^2 = .17$). A Tukey post hoc test revealed differences were present between football (M = 3.49, SD = .83) and women's golfers (M = 2.29, SD = .76), with football players scoring significantly higher. No additional differences based on sport participation were found on the post-test of the AMMSA scale or the pre- or post-test of the ATW scale.

As there were no significant differences between pre- and post-test scores on the ATW scale, it is difficult to say that participants' attitudes toward women changed as a result of the program. However, changing gender norms is a difficult, lengthy process of socialization and culture change that is unlikely to happen in 10 hours, despite best efforts of the program (Coakley, 2015). Analysis of the AMMSA scale showed participants' rape myth acceptance lowered after participating in *Fair Play*. This is also illustrated through the qualitative findings. We will further highlight

these changes by discussing each qualitative theme in detail. RQ3 aimed to understanding how *Fair Play* was effective in educating participants on sexual violence prevention. The program helped participants raise awareness of sexual violence, define sexual violence and consent, and reject rape myths.

Interview results yielded four major themes indicating how *Fair Play* was effective in changing athletes' perceptions of sexual violence (RQ3). Qualitative data analysis found that athletes, after participating in *Fair Play*, were able to (1) articulate how *Fair Play* raised their awareness of sexual violence; (2) define sexual violence appropriately and accurately; (3) define consent as affirmative and mutual; and (4) reject rape myths. These themes will be further explained, particularly in relation to the quantitative data, in the next section. Participants' gender is denoted as (m) for man and (w) for woman to give greater richness to the participant voices in the findings below.

Theme 1: Articulate How *Fair Play* Raised Their Awareness of Sexual Violence

Athletes who participated in interviews could identify that *Fair Play* raised their awareness and impacted their understanding of sexual violence, particularly regarding the prevalence of the topic. "Opened my eyes" was the most commonly used phrase by participants. For example, Participant D (m) said, "It was just really eye-opening to me," and Participant E (w) noted, "I think it opened my eyes to what really can be considered sexual violence." Participant P (m) said, "It definitely opened up my eyes more…I came out of there better than when I came in, uh, knowing about sexual violence." Participant G (w) was able to tie together the need to be aware of sexual violence with the need for prevention. She said, "It just opened my eyes, I think, to how, how very extensive and prominent it is in our culture, and how much of a problem it is, how many people are affected by it, and how desperately we need people to try and, you know, be the force that helps it end." Participant B (w) said, "Sexual violence is so much more common than I thought." Participant N (m) commented, "Obviously I know that stuff happened and I know it was more common than uncommon, but I didn't know that it was nearly the range or consistency as what it really is." In raising awareness, *Fair Play* helped participants understand how often sexual violence occurs.

For many participants, when asked "To what extent did the 10-week program change your knowledge of sexual violence?", they answered that it didn't "change" their knowledge per se, but students said it "broadened," "extended," "supplemented," "expanded," or "further shaped" their knowledge. Other participants said the program gave them a "better understanding" of sexual violence or could articulate a clear and obvious change in their learning. For example, Participant D (m) said, "I learned so much I can't even think of it all." Participant L (m) said the program changed "pretty much like the whole range" of his knowledge of sexual violence. And Participants N (m) and R (m) both used "tremendous" to describe their learning of sexual violence through *Fair Play*.

Theme 2: Define Sexual Violence Appropriately and Accurately

In addition to articulating how *Fair Play* raised their awareness of sexual violence, most participants were also able to define sexual violence in appropriate and accurate ways, reflecting what they learned through the program. During the first two hours of *Fair Play*, facilitators showed athletes a slide defining sexual violence as sexual, nonconsensual, and encompassing actions that are both physical (i.e., sexual assault) and verbal (i.e., sexual harassment). Participant C (w) reflected that back during the interview by stating, "Sexual violence was like, the broad umbrella term that included, like, assault, harassment, rape. So any kind of unwanted, nonconsensual [act]." When asked, "How would you define sexual violence?", all participants could identify nonconsensual action as critical. For example, Participant A (w) said, "Um, probably without consent, definitely. Um, just like rape and physical abuse when there's no consent." Participant T (m) answered this way: "Just anything that she does not want you to do, basically. Without consent." Participant D (m) explained, "Sexual assault, it's like someone is either physically or mentally abused without consent, without them wanting it. it's just something happening to someone that they don't want to happen without them even having a say in it." Even if participants did not use the word "consent" in their explanation, they would still describe the lack of consent as critical to sexual violence. Participant I (m) said,

> Sexual violence, how would I define it, oof, it's uh…there's so much to it, it's hard to put a definition on it! Because it could be from sexual harassment, or like rubbing on a woman's shoulders at work, that's sexual violence. That's not something that they ask for or wanted.

Similarly, Participant M (w) explained,

> [Sexual violence is] more like unwanted…anything that's really physical that could lead to rape…and then, um, sexual harassment was like, worded, verbal. Like, it's very, it's still uncomfortable, but it's still verbal and it's still hitting you, um, to where you just don't want to be wherever you are at that moment.

The idea that sexual violence is rooted in power and control was perfectly articulated by Participant O (m) when he said, "It's the manipulation and/or intention to hurt someone, um, sexually." A common rape myth is that sexual violence happens when a perpetrator just cannot control their lust in a weak moment. *Fair Play* gave athletes tools to understand the power and control dynamics behind the act of sexual violence.

Theme 3: Define Consent as Affirmative and Mutual

As consent is the definitive line between sex and sexual violence, it is important that *Fair Play* participants can understand and define consent. In the program, consent is defined as mutually understood by all parties involved and affirmative (i.e., getting a

"yes" and not the absence of a "no"). Athletes received a short lecture, watched videos, completed worksheets, and engaged in discussions on the differences between consent and nonconsent, as well as how consent is interpreted differently between men and women. For example, research shows that college-aged men are more likely to "get" consent through body language, but women are more likely to say they "give" consent verbally with their words (Jozkowski & Peterson, 2013). One learning objective of *Fair Play* was for all students to understand consent as affirmative and mutually understood, and most participants described consent as such during the interviews. One outlier, Participant K (m), struggled a bit on the verbal affirmative nature of consent. He said,

> Um, so obviously like a yes or something like that but it kind of goes back to body language. Um, I guess I don't really know how to describe consent but like it's just kind of something you have to know when you see it, I guess. But like, even if you're a little unsure, you better make sure.

However, despite this outlier, other participants were clear about consent as a verbal yes, not relying on body language or other cues to assume consent. For example, Participant N (m) said, "Consent is saying yes. That's really the bottom line. Not 'maybe', not 'I don't know'… or 'we can' or 'we should'. It's just yes, honestly." Additionally, Participant H (m) said one has to get consent "outright" further explaining,

> It can't just be assumed. It has to be, you know, you have to get either a yes or um, you have to just get a yes, actually, not like either. You have to get a yes outright. And it can't be that silence is a yes. It has to be an outright yes, or um, your partner saying, "I want this to happen."

Participant J (w) explained consent as, "Saying like 'yes' or 'no'…or like, 'yes, you can do this' or like 'no, like don't do that.'" This demonstrates the need to get an affirmative, verbal consent. Similarly, Participant D (m) said, "You have to ask them." Participant S was most concise, explaining, "Saying yes. No is not yes. Not saying anything is not yes."

This education on consent affirmative and mutual proved critical to some participants in changing their previous knowledge on sexual violence. When asked, "What did you learn during the program?", Participant Q (m) responded,

> I learned that no means no. Which I mean, I – I – I knew before going in. But uh, maybe like some borderline phrases to know is maybe, uh, "Maybe we can do this later" or…like if there's any reflection of negativity, to just not even do anything.

Participant I (m) was particularly enthusiastic about what he learned, tying it back to future curriculum options. He said,

> I have to verbally hear the word yes…anything else is not consent. And if they say yes, and then they say no, that's still not consent. It's yes or it's nothing! … That's a slogan we could do for this class: "It's yes or it's nothing!" That's what it is. They don't say yes, then it's nothing. You're going home.

Comments such as this reflected the nature of consent as something is enthusiastic in its affirmative nature, not something that should be coerced or pressured out of a partner.

Theme 4: Reject Rape Myths

The notion of coercing a partner – that "no" just means "try harder" is one of many pervasive rape myths that exist in rape culture. For example, one Yale fraternity served a five-year suspension after members chanted, "No means yes, yes means anal" during a pledge activity in 2010 (Jackson, 2018). Interview participants demonstrated a rejection of rape myths, demonstrating additional validity of quantitative results on the AMMSA scale. One common rejection of rape myths is that sexual violence is only perpetrated by men and only women are victims. For example, Participant A (w) said, "Males aren't the only ones who rape," and Participant K (m) said, "Some people think that the guys don't get sexually harassed, but obviously it's definitely more common with females." Participant H (m) explained, "Sexual violence…can go also both ways. You know, whether that's a woman to a man, a man to a woman, um, or you know, man to a man, woman to a woman." And Participant O (m) noted, "A lot of times we hear about it with women, but it can happen to males. It can happen to children. It can happen to anybody. Um, that was kinda the biggest thing, it can happen to anybody."

Another common rape myth is that sexual violence is rare and uncommon, or that stories of sexual violence are sensationalized or exaggerated. After participating in *Fair Play*, participants seemed to understand how pervasive sexual violence is in American society. For example, Participant B (w) said, "Sexual violence is much more common than I thought" and Participant H (m) noted, "I think the biggest thing [I learned] is that it happens more frequently than you really think." Participant J (w) connected how society minimizes the severity of sexual violence. She said,

> It [*Fair Play*] kind of like helped to reaffirm just how much people um, like, downplay sexual violence. And kind of like, "Are you sure this happened?" or like, "What do you mean, like, she was into it" and how people tend to believe not…like, not the victims.

This comment from Participant J (w) transitions into another very common rape myth that victims – particularly girls and women – are liars and they are not to be believed about sexual violence. Participant A (w) shared, "No one asks to be raped or sexually abused. And I do not like the way that the news will be like, 'Yeah, she lied.' And I'm like, 'Well, were you there?'" Rape culture also perpetuates the myth that the victim is somehow responsible for the assault (e.g., "She was asking for

it"). During interviews, some participants rejected this rape myth. Participant R (m) discussed how it the program taught him about rape myths, saying, "You know, it doesn't matter what the women wear, you know? …They still get their respect and their boundaries."

One of the most impactful ways that students rejected rape myths was through an understanding of how victims are impacted by sexual violence. One curricular component of *Fair Play* was trying to create empathy for victims through understanding of the impact of sexual violence. Most simply, Participant D (m) noted, "A person's never going to be the same after that again." Participant O (m) connected the self-blame and guilt felt by victims when he said,

> There's a lot of times where they never speak out about it. And in my mind, I'm like, "Why not?" You know? But it's the fact that the embarrassment…a lot of the times you believe it yourself. So it's very hard to talk about that if, in your mind, you're like, "All right, maybe I did deserve this."

Participant O (m) was also astute in connecting the way victims may be treated to sport culture. He said,

> The victim's getting bullied or harassed on, um, Instagram, twitter, whatever. Because a lot of times it happens at these large universities or these high schools that have won a bunch of state championships in football. So now you have ignorant people who are going after the victim, saying, "You're just trying to disrupt what we have" when that's definitely not what their intention is whatsoever.

Participant T (m) made a similar connection between sport culture and victim impact. He said,

> Learning why women don't come out, you know, and talk about the sexual assaults that have happened. I know they brought up, uh, the Missouri running back. And how the girl never spoke out, just because, uh, I think she did, and he kept playing for two more years. There was more girls after that, you know, and nobody wanted to speak up because nothing was being done. Um, so kind of learning those things, kind of just shows you how severe those actions are.

Linking societal adoration of sports to negative impacts on victims was not necessarily a common theme, but one that was found in some participants. However, the overall connection between sports and rape culture was more common. For example, Participant F (w) explained, "That was my biggest takeaway, is that I never realized how much sports like subconsciously kind of ingrains those messages into both men and women."

Through interviews, participants answered RQ3 (How was *Fair Play* effective in changing athletes' understanding of sexual violence?) by demonstrating a raised awareness of sexual violence, the ability to appropriately define sexual violence and

consent, and a rejection of rape myths. These qualitative themes further support the quantitative results that answer RQ2 (Did athletes' rape myth acceptance change as a result of participation in *Fair Play*?), highlighting how participants' rape myth acceptance lowered after participating in *Fair Play*.

Conclusion

Intercollegiate athletes who participated in *Fair Play* demonstrated lower rape myth acceptance, but no significant differences in their attitudes toward women. Because gender norms and socialization processes are difficult to change (Coakley, 2015), there is need for further study and curricular developments on programming and education to reduce negative and harmful attitudes toward women. Participants were able to demonstrate a rejection of rape myths through interviews and the AMM-SA scale, pointing to the efficacy of *Fair Play* in lowering rape myth acceptance, a critical component to ending sexual violence. Interestingly, there were significant differences between male and female participants on rape myth acceptance during the pre-test survey but not on the post-test survey. This demonstrates that *Fair Play* was particularly effective for male athletes, who may be catching up to their female peers on rejecting elements of rape culture after such high levels of intervention (i.e., 10-hour curriculum).

Though response rates for both quantitative and qualitative measures were high, the overall number of participants in *Fair Play* was small (n = 81). In addition, though there was a fairly even distribution of men and women, participants were overwhelming white and exclusively identified as heterosexual. Although this generally reflects the nature of this university's athletic population, it may not be reflective of all athletes at all universities. Thus, generalizability was not feasible with the responses from this sample, nor was it the goal. However, this study did provide pertinent insight on how sexual violence prevention programming may be effective in similar samples. Further research may be necessary to consider the efficacy of *Fair Play* with athletes of color and those who identify as LGBTQ.

Other limitations may include the memory and/or recall of participants. Though the post-test survey was completed immediately after the last hour of programming in fall term, the interviews did not take place until spring, between three and five months after completing *Fair Play*. Thus, some interview participants may have experienced issues with remembering details about the program. However, this not necessarily bad. The fact that some participants can recall some very specific details about sexual violence and the *Fair Play* program is telling in and of itself. This points to elements of the program that were important and memorable for participants, perhaps suggesting efficacy of the curricular and facilitation methods of *Fair Play*.

Future research should address the assessment of successful educational efforts at changing gender norms and roles at both the individual and societal level. Despite the 10 hours of education received in *Fair Play*, participants did not display any significant changes on the ATW scale. More study is needed on how these changes can be made effectively to reduce negative attitudes toward women, which may lead to a reduction in sexual violence. More research is also needed on efficacy of sexual

violence prevention programs such as *Fair Play* in increasing participants' understanding and willingness to engage in bystander intervention.

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NCAA Exit Interviews and Surveys: Academic Experiences of College Athletes

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Institutions are required to conduct exit interviews and surveys (EIS) with departing athletes, however, these instruments are currently an untapped data source for further understanding the college athlete experience. Through the lens of Comeaux and Harrison's conceptual model for student-athlete academic success, this study examined 17 FBS institutions' exit interviews and surveys with 528 athletes, focusing on athletes' academic experiences. Analyses revealed that EIS questions pertaining to educational experiences focused on the following areas surrounding athletic/institutional environment and academic outputs: academic services, overall academic experiences, time demands, coach support of academics, and faculty support. Athletes in this sample expressed overall positive academic experiences and gratitude for the academic services provided. Additionally, the majority of athletes noted few issues with time demands, strong coach support, and positive faculty interactions. These findings challenge some of the current literature noting negative educational experiences and opportunities for college athletes. Implications and recommendations are discussed.

Keywords: exit interviews, exit surveys, intercollegiate athletics, academics

Introduction

According to Article 6.3 of the NCAA's Division I Manual, member institutions are required to conduct end-of-year exit interviews or surveys with departing athletes (NCAA Manual, 2019). These interviews are conducted by the athletic director, senior woman administrator (SWA) or another representative (excluding coaches and team staff members). Interviews must be performed with each sport, but the sample of athletes selected is determined by the institution (NCAA Manual, 2019). The only factor institutions must consider when selecting athletes is that their athletic eligibility has expired. Having completed eligibility may result in less retaliation and allows for athletes to provide feedback and express their opinions more honestly. However, some athletes may still be apprehensive about such processes and potential retaliation if they wish to take advantage of sport connections and opportunities upon graduation, such as graduate assistant positions (Hermandorfer, 2014; Johns & Gorrick, 2016).

Despite the vagueness of the rule and the lack of uniformity across the NCAA when it comes to exit interview and survey implementation, bylaw 6.3 provides a positive outlet for athletes to share their experiences and be heard by campus leaders. Similarly, these documents present a unique opportunity to appreciate the athlete voice in evaluating how athletics operates. Data collected from the exit interviews and surveys are used to evaluate athletics programs and are examined by athletic directors, university presidents, coaches, faculty athletics representatives, and others. Information may be used to determine how teams and the department as a whole are serving their athletes (NCAA Manual, 2019). However, few researchers and practitioners have access to such information, thus, not much is known about what athletes discuss in these settings. Similarly, little is known due to the often-sensitive nature of subjects discussed (Gordon, 2011, 2014).

Exit interviews and surveys are currently an under-explored area in the intercollegiate athletics literature. Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) exit interview and survey data for this study was gathered from *The Intercollegiate*, a public-service journalism platform that critically examines college athletics. Through the lens of Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) model for student-athlete academic success, this study examined 528 athletes from 17 programs to explore educational experiences and highlight athlete voices. Many scholars note the increasing commercialization of collegiate athletics and the decreasing focus on academics (Clotfelter, 2019 Gurney et al., 2017; Lumpkin, 2017). The prioritization of sports over education influences athletes' experiences and potentially minimizes their voices, especially when it comes to academics. Additionally, while the NCAA requires athletic departments to conduct exit interviews and surveys, some departments may just be checking a box and fulfilling a requirement, without placing much intentionality and care into understanding the experiences of their athletes (Libit, 2020).

However, it is crucial to understand how college athletes and their academic experiences are impacted by this commercialization process in order to make meaningful improvements in this field and enhance their time in college (Lumpkin, 2017). Analysis of exit interviews and surveys provide a unique avenue for this endeavor. Particular attention was given to academics, as scholars have noted that education tends to take a backseat in the college athletics model (Gurney et al., 2017; Hirko & Sweitzer, 2015; Lumpkin, 2017), so, a deeper analysis of athletes' academic experiences is warranted. With this in mind, the purpose of this study was to explore the athlete academic experience through the voices of athlete participants themselves so athletic departments can capitalize on these narratives and improve their exit interviews and surveys and athletes' experiences as students. As such, the following research questions were addressed: (1) what academic topics are discussed in exit interviews and surveys; and (2) what do college athletes say about their academic experiences?

Literature Review

This literature review discusses two important areas, beginning with the origins and purpose of exit interviews and surveys. The next section examines the current

literature on academic experiences of college athletes, paying particular focus to admissions, time demands, stereotypes, pressures to remain eligible, and academic support.

Exit Interviews and Surveys

Originating in the business industry, exit interviews and surveys (EIS) are an exchange of information between a departing employee and a representative of an organization (Buhler, 2011; Gordon, 2014). The purpose of EIS is to gain information about how an employee feels about the company environment, compensation and benefits, professional development, and relationships with co-workers (Gordon, 2014). Questions asked and topics discussed may vary from one organization to another, but regardless of the questions and topics, if used appropriately, the data provided can ensure organizations are achieving goals while maintaining employee satisfaction. In fact, over 91% of Fortune 500 companies collect EIS data and use it to improve culture and retention (Zojceska, 2018). Once organizations have collected data from EIS, interventions can be adapted to make advancements, or new policies can be implemented (Johns & Gorrick, 2016).

Scholars (Gordon, 2011; Hargie, 2006) emphasize the importance of contact and structure of EIS protocols. For example, contact with the departing employee during EIS should be made by a third, neutral party outside of the organization, but someone with experience in EIS (Johns & Gorrick, 2016). Branham (2005) examined how multiple companies experiencing high turnover were able to shift their practices and maintain their most critical workers. One method these companies used was EIS conducted by a third party, which allowed for employees to feel comfortable in expressing their reasons for leaving.

Despite the host of benefits EIS offer organizations, there are a few critiques to the process (Gordon, 2014). Administrative critiques stem mostly from practitioners, as organizations rarely use the information garnered from EIS to implement improvements. The methodological critique argues that techniques used to conduct EIS are fundamentally flawed, and thus, lack reliability and validity (Gordon, 2014; Schmitt, 2014; Williams et al., 2008). Due to the underlying deficiencies of the methods, the results obtained from EIS may be biased and inaccurately represent the departing employees' experiences. In examining the EIS process of a large publishing company, Johns and Gorrick (2016) found that departing employees were reluctant to offer their true reasons for leaving the company and did not want to negatively influence the work environment of their remaining colleagues or "burn any bridges" in case they needed a reference letter or wanted to collaborate in the future (p. 10). Additionally, some were concerned with how their private information would be handled. Thus, they offered less controversial responses to the EIS questions. However, most of the employees in the study still found the EIS process an effective avenue to offer constructive feedback.

In spite of these criticisms, exit interviews and surveys have been adopted by various other fields including intercollegiate athletics. Since 1991, the NCAA has required institutions to conduct EIS with departing athletes who have exhausted their

eligibility (NCAA Manual, 2019). Athletic EIS are conducted with an institutional or athletic department self-selected sample of athletes from each sport and are administered by an athletic department representative such as a faculty athletics representative (FAR) or senior woman administrator (SWA). There is no uniform NCAA EIS protocol, so institutions are at liberty to create their own questions and practices. While this enables flexibility for schools to address specifics related to their own programs, it hinders cross-comparison in experiences between NCAA divisions, conferences, and institutions.

Additionally, during their collegiate careers, athletes may be silenced or encouraged not to speak out when they have concerns for fear of repercussions, such as loss of scholarship status or playing time (Benedict & Keteyian, 2014; Hawkins et al., 2015). Implementation of EIS in athletics is important because it provides athletes an outlet to discuss and share their academic, athletic, and social experiences. For example, in 2017 results from EIS at Syracuse University noted that athletes experienced racially insensitive remarks from their coaches and were forced into majors they did not want (Burke, 2017). Based on the narratives of the athletes in this EIS, the Faculty Oversight Committee was able to make suggestions to the athletic director, such as reminding coaches to be more racially sensitive and providing better advising about major options (Faculty Oversight Committee Annual Report, 2017). More recently, in the process of requesting EIS, members of *The Intercollegiate* uncovered accusations of coach abuse within Texas Tech University's women's basketball team (Libit, 2020). Prior to uncovering these documents and making them public, these athletes' voices were silenced as they continued to compete under their coach (Libit, 2020). As a result of this exposure, the coach was terminated and Texas Tech has released statements supporting their athletes and noting they will take action to improve athletes' experiences at the institution (Epstein, 2020).

Both of the above examples highlight the importance of EIS documents as a data source and their ability to enhance the athlete experience. However, limited research has explored the nexus of athletics and EIS and little is understood about what departing athletes say about their collegiate experiences. This limits the importance of the athlete voice in intercollegiate athletics, prevents important research from being conducted, and hinders the ability to enhance athletes' experiences as students. This study fills this current literature gap by (1) exploring athlete EIS by honing in on athletes' academic experiences and (2) elevating the athlete voice.

Academic Experiences of College Athletes

College Entrance

Prior to enrollment in college, athletes are required to meet NCAA academic conditions and be cleared by the NCAA Eligibility Center. These conditions include enrolling in certain core courses, maintaining a minimum 2.3 grade point average (GPA) in these courses, and receiving minimum scores on standardized tests (Play Division I Sports, n.d.). These minimums are under scrutiny as some athletes are specially admitted and not held to similar entrance standards as non-athletes (Hendricks

& Johnson, 2016). Thus, some athletes come to campus underprepared for the rigors of college courses (Rubin & Moses, 2017; Smith & Willingham, 2015). This lack of preparation for college can pose potential problems once athletes are enrolled, however, athletes are capable of having beneficial educational experiences. Knowing more about what athletes say regarding their academic experiences through EIS aids in understanding their experiences.

Time Demands

At the heart of academic experiences are time demands, or the equilibrium athletes find concerning their obligations, requirements, and opportunities pertaining to athletics and academics (Gayles, 2015). The NCAA mandates that college athletes spend no more than 20 hours per week on their sport (NCAA Manual, 2019). However, in the most recent NCAA GOALS study, athletes self-reported spending upwards of 34 hours per week on their sport-related activities, along with 38.5 hours on their academics (NCAA GOALS, 2016). Research on time demands demonstrates that finding and maintaining a balance between sport and school is moderately challenging for Division I athletes (Di Lu et al., 2018). Time demands may also make the athlete experience distinct from their counterparts not participating in intercollegiate sport. In their seminal piece, Potuto and O'Hanlon (2007) surveyed 2,335 athletes at Division I schools and compared their results to non-athletes from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Only 36% of athletes reported participating in curriculars outside of sports, while 52% of non-athletes reported involvement in curriculars. More recently, a time demands study of Pacific 12 Conference athletes noted that 70% of participants voiced an interest in participating in a study abroad or internship program but were unable to due to athletic time demands (Penn Schoen Berland, 2016). Still, some athletes do not report issues with time demands and others even report that they wish to spend more time on sports (NCAA GOALS, 2016; Penn Schoen Berland, 2016). More research is needed to examine the relationship between academic experiences and athlete time demands.

Faculty Interactions

Some faculty maintain the "dumb jock" stereotype of college athletes, which holds that athletes only enroll in college to play their sport and are less capable than their non-athlete peers (Wininger & White, 2008). Research also demonstrates that faculty hold more prejudicial attitudes toward athletes than non-athletes (Engstrom et al., 1995). Comeaux (2011b) employed an adapted situational attitude scale (SAS) for athletes to examine 464 faculty members perceptions of non-athletes and athletes at a Division I institution. The scale asked faculty to rate their feelings toward non-athletes and athletes in various hypothetical scenarios such as receiving an A in their class, being admitting with lower standardized scores, and receiving a scholarship. Results indicated that faculty held more prejudicial views of athletes. For example, when compared to non-athletes, faculty thought it unexpected and impossible for an athlete to receive an A in their class. Additionally, scenarios in which athletes were successful elicited feelings of suspicion and resentment. Importantly, not all athletes

report poor experiences with faculty. However, some athlete groups, particularly those in the revenue-generating sports of men's basketball and football, or those who are athletes of color, may have more negative academic experiences than athletes in non-revenue sports or those who are members of dominant racial groups (Comeaux, 2011a, 2011b; Singer, 2015, 2019).

These negative stereotypes influence academic performance: heightening an athlete's athletic identity via stereotypical perceptions increases their vulnerability to the dumb jock narrative, which then negatively influences their academic experiences (Stone et al., 2012; Yopyk & Prentice, 2005). In spite of this potential obstacle, many athletes report positive academic experiences (Penn Schoen Berland, 2016) and 66% of athletes report a strong relationship with at least one faculty member (NCAA GOALS, 2016). More research is necessary to flesh out faculty-athlete relationships.

Athlete Pressures

The pressure to remain eligible or focus solely on athletics is also part of the athlete academic experience (Gayles, 2015), with this insistence potentially coming from coaches and academic advisors (Horner et al., 2016; Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016; Rubin & Moses, 2017). Some scholars believe that commercialization resulting in increased pressure and win-at-all-costs mentalities in athletics has led to an increase in a focus on eligibility over education and academic misconduct, such as the decades-long scandal at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (Gurney et al., 2017; Ridpath, 2010; Smith & Willingham, 2015). For example, former UNC-Chapel Hill basketball star Rashad McCants spoke out against his former institution, explaining that he was steered toward easier classes to maintain his eligibility (Carolina Alumni Review, 2014). When asked about the courses he was enrolled in during an interview with *ESPN*, McCants said,

> I thought it was part of the college experience… You're not there to get an education, though they tell you that. You're there to make revenue for the college. You're there to put fans in the seats. You're there to bring prestige to the university by winning games (Carolina Alumni Review, 2014).

Coaches play a significant role in the lives of athletes and can influence the energy players dedicate to academics (Hawkins et al, 2015; Horner et al., 2016). While coaches may stress the importance of receiving an education during the recruiting process, this emphasis tends to decline once the athlete enrolls at the institution and begins competing (Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016). Some scholars note that this results in a "compromised version" of academics (Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016, p. 502) and the overall "miseducation" of college athletes, particularly athletes of color (Shropshire & Williams, 2017; Singer, 2015, 2019).

Coaches who are supportive have athletes who perform well across environments, including on the courts and in classrooms (Jowett, 2017). However, limited research exists on positive athlete-coach dyads and the influence this relationship has

on educational experiences. Thus, further examining the experiences athletes have with their coaches concerning academics is crucial to not only better understanding these situations, but also to improving the academic opportunities of college athletes.

Academic Support Programs

In 1991, the NCAA required institutions to provide academic support services for athletes and since then, these programs have become a popular topic of research and media attention. Athletic academic support programs provide advisors for athletes, tutoring, study hall areas, mentorship, and a host of other resources. These centers have coincided with an increase in athlete retention and graduation, thus, clearly influencing the athlete academic experience (Huml et al., 2014). Ridpath (2010) noted that athletes expressed a need and usefulness regarding the resources provided by academic support programs. However, he also found an over-reliance by revenue-generating athletes on the use of these resources to remain eligible rather than taking advantage of a college education (Ridpath, 2010). This is backed by research from other scholars noting that academic support programs are now commonly viewed and used as an avenue to merely maintain eligibility. In a study by Huml and colleagues (2014) some athletes found the support center to be a hindrance to their academic development because the building was isolated from other areas of campus and made it more challenging to develop relationships with faculty and others outside of the athletic community.

Despite the aforementioned concerns, over 75% of college athletes report positive overall academic experiences during their time in college (NCAA GOALS, 2016). The current scholarship discussed offers insight into the athlete academic experience, however, this literature has yet to tap into athlete EIS to directly appreciate the athletes discuss their experiences.

Conceptual Framework

Athlete EIS were examined through the lens of Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) conceptual model of academic success for student-athletes. While most higher education conceptual models are built to understand and explain the traditional student population, Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) model is tailored toward college athletes, making it an appropriate framework for this research. The model is inclusive of cumulative processes and factors that help explain the academic experiences of athletes, including precollege characteristics and initial commitments, social and academic systems and integration, commitments post-integration, and academic success (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Based on limitations in the data collected via EIS and the reflective nature of the EIS process, this study focuses on the athlete environment, including social and academic systems and academic integration, along with outputs including post-integration commitments and academic success.

An athlete's social system includes faculty and peer interactions, the Scholar-Baller paradigm, coach demands, and sport participation. The academic system encompasses grades, intellectual development, and the Scholar-Baller paradigm

(Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). While these are distinct systems, the two interplay and influence one another. For example, stringent demands from a coach (social system) to focus more on athletics, could impact an athlete's ability to perform well in the classroom or develop intellectually (academic system). Additionally, the Scholar-Baller paradigm was established by Harrison and Boyd (2007) to improve athlete academic success and integration and was designed for academic support services, highlighting the importance of these programs for college athletes. The above systems and their components are areas discussed in athletic EIS.

Social and academic integration, such as the ability to meet faculty in office hours and confidence in one's academic capabilities, are crucial in producing commitments to one's goals, sport, and institution (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). Goal commitments may include an athlete's plan to pursue graduate school, making an athlete more likely to matriculate (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Tinto, 1975). The psychological and physical time and energy spent on sport is one's sport commitment, while academic commitment encompasses the feelings an athlete holds toward their institution and the importance assigned to degree attainment (Tinto, 1975). As athletes reflect on their college experience in EIS, commitments are a likely topic of discussion.

Finally, the above culminate in and help explain the athlete's academic success or failure. Using Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) conceptual model to examine athletic EIS can assist practitioners and scholars in better understanding athletes' experiences and the various processes and factors that go into academic success. As athletes reflect on these in EIS, this information can be used to enact important changes or improvements to the social and academic systems, integration and commitments, and ultimately academic success.

Method

Materials

There are various platforms used for athletic EIS and documents from *The Intercollegiate* were selected. This EIS outlet serves as an active research collaborator with scholars while critically studying college athletics and makes the data collected public unlike other platforms. The public availability is particularly important as it enhances transparency, credibility, and dependability of both the data obtained by the platform and the results of this study (Nowell et al., 2017). *The Intercollegiate* filed formal records requests with every Division I institution subject to public disclosure laws for 2018-2019 EIS documents (Exit Interviews, n.d.). *The Intercollegiate* notes that many institutions denied these requests, citing privacy laws or exemptions in disclosure of public records. While some institutions provided EIS data, others offered only their questions or blank forms without athlete responses. Additionally, some schools included end-of-season interviews or surveys and those are not included in this study as these instruments are different from measures used in EIS and could have varying results as many athletes in end-of-season analyses must return to

their institution and may not be as honest in their responses. Still, the EIS information provides great insight into the academic experiences of athletes. One hundred and twenty-one institutions complied with the requests, but only 63 offered athlete responses. Of those, 17 were in the FBS and constitute the sample in this study.

The EIS in this sample included surveys filled out by the athletes themselves (n = 9 schools) and interview documents in which athlete responses were recorded by a representative (n = 8 schools). Additionally, 6 institutions resided in the Power Five (P5): the Atlantic Coast Conference (1), Big Ten (1), Big 12 (2), Pac-12 (1), and the Southeastern Conference (1). Eleven institutions came from four conferences outside of the P5: Conference USA (3), Mid-American Conference (3), Mountain West Conference (3), and the Western Athletic Conference (2). The EIS in this sample ranged in style of questions, such as Likert scale, yes/no, and open-ended and topics.

It is important to note that the internal validity of these documents has not been addressed by *The Intercollegiate* or the researcher. It is unknown, for example, if the representatives interviewing the athletes performed member checking by returning their session notes to athletes to corroborate findings. Additionally, the validity of the responses requires some assumptions. The first assumption is that the athletes participating in the EIS answered the questions honestly. The second assumption is that for EIS that were recorded by a representative rather than the athletes themselves, the representative accurately and truthfully represented the answers athletes provided. Thus, the EIS documents only reflect the insight provided by the athletes to their institutions. However, because this data set is available to the public and other researchers, reliability of this research is maintained (Merriam, 2002; Nowell et al., 2017).

Participants

Participants in this study included collegiate athletes selected by their institutions to complete EIS, and who had exhausted their athletic eligibility at their institution by the end of the 2019 academic year (n = 528). Twenty-four percent (n = 127) were athletes in the P5, while the remaining 76% (n = 401) came from athletes competing outside the P5. The anonymity of the participants was maintained by the institutions when they responded to the information request, by *The Intercollegiate* via additional redactions, and by the researcher who did not make attempts to discover or disclose the identity of the participants. To further protect athlete identity, institutional names are not included with later narratives.

Due to these safeguards, little demographic information is available about the athletes in this sample. Thus, race, ethnicity, sex, and sport are largely unknown. However, because the athletes have completed their eligibility at their institution, it is likely that the age range of the sample falls between 21 and 23 years old. Additionally, pre-college characteristics of these athletes are also unknown and outside the scope of the EIS and this research. However, a detailed description of the analyses is provided below to ensure credibility and dependability of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017).

Analyses

As suggested by Nowell and colleagues (2017) the five phases of thematic analysis pre-publication were followed to assist in establishing trustworthiness of this study. In phase one, the author became familiar with the data and documented theoretical thoughts and notes about potential codes and themes. Upon completion of reviewing the EIS, the author employed a deductive approach based on Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) conceptual model of academic success for student-athletes and re-examined the data (Miles et al., 2020). Here, phases two through five were initiated, which included coding, theming, reviewing the themes, and finalizing the themes (Nowell et al., 2017).

Document analysis was performed on the EIS to gather the academic topics discussed that related to the social and academic systems, integration, commitments, and academic success presented in the conceptual model (Brown, 2009; Brey, 2018), which assisted in answering RQ1. A priori coding was employed based on Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) work for common questions and topics pertaining to athlete's academic experiences. Descriptive first cycle a priori coding to second cycle pattern coding (Miles et al., 2020; Saldana, 2016) was performed to summarize the codes into a number of smaller categories which resulted in the following themes from EIS: overall academic experience, academic support services, coaches' support of academics, interactions with faculty, and time demands.

Next, athlete responses to these questions were examined to address RQ2. For example, some institutions asked athletes to rate their overall academic experience on a scale of 1 to 10. Here, frequency in ratings were used to offer a more descriptive analysis of answers to these questions, which allowed for patterns in athlete academic experiences to emerge (Lofland et al., 2006). For more open-ended questions, concept coding and NVivo coding were coupled to organize athlete narratives into macrolevels of meaning, which provided "bigger picture" analyses that could then be organized by repeated themes (Miles et al., 2020). This method allowed for participants' narratives to be condensed into themes while also retaining their voices (Saldana, 2016).

Results

Instrument & Content [RQ1]

The most common question topic in this sample of EIS pertained to academic services offered by the athletic department. Some sub-topics in this area included discussing the quality of the advising, experiences with tutors and study hall, and potential resource improvement. These questions tended to be open-ended allowing for athletes to elaborate on their response or closed-ended Likert questions that involved rating received services (i.e., "on a scale of one to ten rate your experience with academic support").

The next most frequent question topics included those about academic experiences and time demands. Questions related to both of these topics ranged in style. While some institutions preferred closed-ended Likert-style questions (i.e., "rate

your overall academic experience"), others asked open-ended questions on these topics (i.e., "did you have a good experience academically?"). The final two topics covered by EIS questions pertained to the academic support of coaches and faculty support.

In keeping with the above results, the majority of athletic departments (n = 16, 94%) asked questions about academic services. Table 1 details the frequency with which the schools in this sample asked questions related to the remaining topics: academic experiences, time demands, coach academic support, faculty support, and other. Topics discussed in the other category include general improvements to academics and major steering.

Table 1

Academic Questions Asked of Exiting Athletes

Topic	Number of Departments	%
Academic Services	16	94%
Academic Experience	14	82%
Time Demands	11	65%
Coach Academic Support	8	47%
Faculty Support	3	18%
Other	3	18%
Total Athletic Departments	17	100%

Athlete Experiences [RQ2]

Overall, athletes in this sample indicated that they enjoyed their collegiate academic experiences (see Table 2). Of the 144 athletes who answered questions about this topic, 96% (n = 138) expressed having a good or excellent academic experience. One athlete said, "I love this school and its traditions. As a student the classes are difficult, but to say I got my degree from here is really exciting." Another respondent added, "I loved it. Going to school and playing was difficult, but it was the best four years of my life." The remaining 4% (n = 6) stated that their experience was average, and no athlete discussed having a poor experience academically.

Of the entire sample of 528 athletes, 437 (83%) answered questions about athletic-academic support services. Almost ninety-percent of athletes found the academic support services (i.e., advisors, tutors, mentors, etc.) to be of good (n = 212, 49%) or excellent quality (n = 180, 40%). One athlete who felt strongly supported stated: "This environment is hands down the most supportive environment I have ever been in." An athletic representative noted that an athlete she interviewed said her advisor advocated for her when she had a conflict with academic and athletic demands. A

Table 2

Athlete Responses to Academic Experiences

	Academic Services		Coach Academic Support		Faculty Support		Overall Academic Experience	
Rating	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Excellent	180	41%	170	44%	53	33%	86	60%
Good	212	49%	141	36%	75	47%	52	36%
Average/Neutral	28	6%	46	12%	21	13%	6	4%
Poor	17	4%	33	8%	10	6%	0	0%
Total	437	100%	390	100%	159	100%	144	100%

few athletes in the sample (n = 17, 4%) did express poor experiences with academic support. For example, one athlete mentioned that their experience was frustrating because they felt advisors were "putting athletes in classes just to stay eligible." Additionally, athletes in this category also discussed how limited the resources were for athletes in majors that were considered more rigorous and how the study hall area was not conducive to learning and suggested making it "less of a social environment."

Athletes were also asked about their experiences with time demands (see Table 3). The most common question in this category involved whether athletes missed class for practice or competitions. Eighty-five percent of athletes explicitly stated they had not missed class for practice or competitions, while 9% said that they had foregone attending class for a sports-related activity. Additionally, 6% (n = 20) of athletes said that their athletic time demands hindered their ability to enroll in certain majors or take classes. One athlete stated, that they wanted to enroll in their institution's computer science program, but "most of the computer sciences classes are during practice." Another added,

> I had extra outside work assignments for classes such as interviews, site visits, meet and greets and I always felt conflicted with having to make a choice on missing these activities or attend practice. Even with ample warning time for said events, I would still feel both conflicted and often yelled at for having put my education first.

The time demands literature notes the struggles of many athletes to balance academics. However, 151 (42%) athletes mentioned that their demands were excellent, good, or that they did not have issues. For example, when one athlete was asked, "was your practice/competition schedule ever a hindrance to you academically," they replied, "no, academics were always a top priority. We are STUDENT-athletes." Another athlete voiced, "time demands were really good. Allotted time for practice is sufficient and class always comes first."

Thirty-eight athletes in this sample (11%) believed their time demands were poor or struggled to find an equilibrium between the various demands of their school and sport obligations. One athlete mentioned there was "no balance" and another discussed issues with the demands: "I was not prepared enough for how difficult the time expectations of being a student-athlete were going to be. I do not know, though, if there is any amount of teaching or preparation that can get you ready for that." Still, others noted that being an athlete was "like having a part-time job."

Academic support from head coaches and faculty were also discussed throughout the EIS in this sample. Of the athletes who discussed these topics, 80% (n = 311) believed their head coaches offered good or excellent support of their academic pursuits. One athlete voiced, "coaches in our program were very understanding when it came to classes and school and want us to be the best students we can be." Other athletes noted that their coaches would let them leave practice early or skip weekend competitions to keep up their grades. One such athlete discussed that his coach "understands you have a life more than just football." Additionally, 80% (n = 128) of the athletes asked about faculty support found professors to be helpful and positive during their academic careers.

Table 3

Athlete Responses to Time Demands

Category	*n*	%
Excellent	52	14%
Good	71	20%
Neutral/"No Issues"	58	16%
Bad	18	5%
Time Management is Key	25	7%
Need a More Consistent Schedule	24	7%
Struggled to Balance Demands	20	6%
Hindered Ability to Enroll in Classes	20	6%
Demands Come with being an Athlete	18	5%
Adjusted to the Demands	17	5%
Total	360	

Note. Total reflects the number of athletes who answered questions pertaining to time demands. Athletes may have offered responses that fell in multiple categories above; thus, the total percentage does not add up to 100%.

When analyzing these findings two items are important to note: athletes in this sample were not necessarily asked about all of the topics discussed (i.e., some athletes may have just answered a question about their overall academic experience and nothing else) and some of the questions posed inquired about multiple topics (i.e., double-barreled questions), thus one question could have one or multiple codes.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to improve understanding of the athlete academic experience, while simultaneously elevating the athlete voice in these experiences. To achieve this purpose, this research addressed the following two questions: (1) what academic topics do athletic departments ask their athletes; and (2) what do college athletes say about their academic experiences? This study explored the academic experiences of 528 departing athletes across 17 different FBS institutions, adding a unique contribution to the current literature on intercollegiate sports. These EIS and the athletes' voices within them offer practitioners in athletics and higher education the opportunity to not only better understand the athlete academic experience, but also the ability to capitalize on what is said to improve the experiences of the next generation of athletes, thus providing support for the utility of these processes in intercollegiate athletics. The remainder of this section discusses the topics and styles of questions asked during athletic EIS followed by an examination of athlete responses. Implications and recommendations for the field are provided.

Instrument & Content

The topics and design of the questions asked demonstrate where institutions and athletic departments place their attention and what they deem important. In total, the 17 institutions in this sample asked 637 questions across varying topics. Of these, only 90 or 14% pertained to academics, which may suggest that these schools did not emphasize or believe academics to be a critical component to their athletes' collegiate experiences, supporting prior scholarship noting the emphasis on revenue generation and commercialization over education (Lumpkin, 2017). Additionally, if they are *student*-athletes, one might expect more EIS questions pertaining to their student role. Satterfield, Croft, and Godfrey (2010) agree with this, highlighting the fact that athlete academic experiences and success "should be shared between the athlete and the university in general because of the student label, and specifically on the athletic department because of the athlete label" (p. 2). So, as institutions and athletic departments continue to take on some responsibility for providing appropriate academic opportunities for their athletes, Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) conceptual model can be used as a guide to not only mold these experiences, but also inquire about them in EIS.

The most common academic topic discussed during EIS regarded academic services, such as experiences with and helpfulness of advisors, the quality of tutoring and study hall, and other academic resources such as mentorship programs and computer labs, which are critical components to the academic systemic discussed by

Comeaux and Harrison (2011). The NCAA has increased its emphasis on academics (Division I Academic Progress Rate, n.d.), so athletic departments and institutions continue to allocate more money and resources to athletes and programs supporting them (Huml et al., 2014; Knight Commission, 2014). Additionally, recent academic-athletic scandals, such as those at UNC-Chapel Hill and the University of Missouri in which staff over-assisted athletes, demonstrate a need to pay closer attention to academic support programs (Lederman, 2019; Smith & Willingham, 2015). Thus, it is unsurprising that the majority of academic questions pertained to these services.

The next topics most frequently discussed were those pertaining to overall academic experience and time demands, composing parts of athletes' academic and social systems, respectively (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). The majority of questions about these topics were open-ended and allowed for respondents to expand upon their experiences. With much of the current literature and media attention given to the importance of the academic experience and time demands (Haslerig, 2018; Rubin, 2016; Wolverton, 2016), it is rational that these topics are commonly discussed. Eighty-two percent of schools in this sample discussed the former, while 65% inquired about the latter. Additionally, allowing athletes to expand upon their educational and time demands experiences facilitates a deeper understanding of these areas for the athletic department, while encouraging athletes to be honest about opportunities.

Finally, athletes were asked questions about the academic support they received from two key components of their social system (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011): head coaches and faculty. Experiences with coaches and faculty are also prominent areas of intercollegiate athletics scholarship (Engstrom et al., 1995; Horner et al, 2016; Simons et al., 2007) and scholarship continues to expand upon the ways in which these groups on campus can influence athletes. Horner and colleagues (2016) note that college athletes are most dependent upon their coaches for guidance and support, as they are key information holders in their social systems. Some athletes in their study noted that coaches used this information as a form of power to dictate and control their athletes, such as not informing them of certain academic programs or emphasizing the team performance over being socially integrated outside of sport. Still, other athletes had coaches who used information to be supportive of academics (Horner et al., 2016). Thus, while some coaches facilitated social and academic integration and commitments (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011), others did not. Faculty also play a significant role in providing academic information and encouragement for many athletes, but research indicates that this positivity is contingent upon the nature of those interactions and other factors including the races of the faculty and athlete, the faculty's field of study, the athlete's sport, and prior experiences with members of the groups (Comeaux, 2011a). Due to the significance of athlete-coach and athlete-faculty relationships in developing athletes during college, more understanding of these dyads can be garnered from EIS if the questions are structured appropriately.

Half of the questions in these categories allowed for athletes to expand upon their experiences, and this ability to expand might be particularly important for questions pertaining to relationships with coaches and faculty as some studies have em-

phasized the potential negative interactions athletes can have with these parties (Bell, 2009; Comeaux 2011a, 2011b). Athletic EIS should offer departing athletes more opportunities to elaborate about their experiences. While roughly 62% of academic questions did allow for athletes to expand, not offering respondents this opportunity to further discuss a topic may indicate that the athletic department does not really care about that component of the athlete's experience. For example, one institution asked its athletes to "please rate the following areas as they relate to your sport: coaches' support of academics." This was a closed-ended Likert style question that did not allow athletes to expand. Two athletes from this university rated their coach as "below average" in this category, but they were not able to offer more feedback, such as why they felt this way or how their coach could be more supportive. Because the athletes could not provide more information, the athletic department has two options: (a) do more work later to figure out why or how this coach was lacking in academic support, or (b) not do anything about the results and forego developing their coach and improving the experiences of their athletes. The former is inefficient, and the latter is negligent.

Instrument & Content Recommendations

One major recommendation stemming from this research is that the NCAA should mandate a new policy for the creation of a uniform EIS instrument and process. For decades, scholars have tried to compare the experiences of college athletes across divisions, schools, and sports. Having a uniform EIS would assist future researchers by allowing for more in depth and accurate comparisons and analyses. As it currently stands, each athletic department creates its own EIS and can select its own athletes. This autonomy is important; it allows athletic departments to ask institution-specific questions, such as those about leadership academies or those pertaining to a certain team, such as one that experienced high coach turnover. However, this lack of uniformity makes it challenging to truly compare the experiences of athletes across institutions. The ability to cross-compare academic experiences of athletes at varying levels and/or at different institutions can ensure that equitable educational experiences are taking place across the Association. If such experiences are not occurring, new policies or programs can be put forward by those in student or athletic affairs to ensure athletes are academically engaged in their college environment while getting the most out of their athletic opportunities. Consistency in questions would make observations from FBS to FCS to Divisions I, II, and III more applicable and accurate. From there, improvements to the athlete experience can be made.

Another recommendation is to encourage athletes to complete the EIS rather than having an athletics representative fill out the form. While the representative cannot be a coach, another administrator in power can still conduct the interview, which may skew the willingness of the participants to answer honestly. Using a third neutral party, as research on EIS suggests, or having the participant fill out the form directly, can ensure honesty and integrity in the process. Additionally, certain topics are not widely discussed in the EIS in this sample, despite being prominent areas in the literature and athlete academic experience. These areas include steering and clus-

tering to particular majors or courses and academic performance (Burke, 2017; Gayles, 2015; Sanders & Hildenbrand, 2010). Knowing this information in conjunction with the answers to the questions about academic experiences, academic services, time demands, and coach and faculty support, would allow for a stronger instrument and better analysis of the athlete academic experience. Not inquiring further about these topics may suggest that institutions are not concerned about course and major funneling or academic performance, or that they do not want to know the answers to these questions.

Finally, institutions should abide by privacy laws, but still make their athletic EIS available to researchers. This can be done, and anonymity can be maintained. Further access is crucial to reforming and improving the academic experiences of athletes, while addressing issues of transparency in intercollegiate athletics (Knight Commission, 2010). EIS data could also be employed to suggest policy changes. In recent years, researchers and practitioners alike have proposed regulatory changes without the use of EIS, such as those that have come forward in about time demands (Wolverton, 2016) and academic reforms (Gurney et al., 2017; Lumpkin, 2017). It is likely that if these proposals included information obtained from athlete EIS, these policies could gain more support and assist in both honoring the voices of athletes and enhancing their academic experience. Additionally, such actions would make the EIS data source increasingly valuable to the intercollegiate athletics community.

Athlete Experience

Overall Academic Experience

Many of the findings from the EIS in this sample challenge the current negative light on the academic experiences of college athletes and claims of incompatibility between higher education and sports (Gurney et al., 2017; Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016; Knight Commission, 2010). None of the 144 athletes questioned about their overall academic experience voiced concerns over a poor experience, while 96% (n = 138) expressed having a positive academic experience. One athlete noted that their academic experience was "exactly what I needed to be successful," while another mentioned they planned to graduate with two majors and two minors. When asked about their academic experience, one participant noted how thankful they were for the chance to compete in their sport while attending school: "Academically [insert institution] has given me every opportunity to succeed and discover my passion. Very grateful for all that I've learned here." The athletes' comments above reflect strong goal and institutional commitment, likely stemming from strong social and academic integration within their campus communities (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011).

Still, a few athletes did note some academic concerns during their careers, such as issues transferring credits or finding courses that met degree requirements. Similar attitudes have been expressed by athletes in previous studies (Huml et al., 2014; Rubin & Moses, 2017). One respondent added that they "would've liked more master's options" and wished they were challenged more academically because "some undergrad classes were a bit of a joke." Despite these less than ideal scenarios for the

above participants, their narratives indicate a strong commitment to their goals and institution and the desire to be further integrated outside of sports. These athletes still gave their overall academic experience high marks. Thus, the majority of athletes in this sample were able to capitalize on the benefits provided by their social and academic systems to integrate into their communities and therefore find successful academic experiences.

If academics takes a backseat to athletics as some scholars assert (Hirko and Sweitzer, 2015; Huml et al., 2019), one would expect athletes to express more dissatisfaction toward their academic experiences. However, this is not what the athletes in this sample indicated. This is a significant finding because it counters the current belief held by many scholars that athletes do not have ample educational experiences. Thus, perhaps researchers and practitioners should reconsider this assumption.

Time Demands

The responses from time demands questions also counter the current narrative that athletes are over-burdened by their dual roles as students and athletes. Fourteen percent, 20%, and 16% of participants noted that their time demands were excellent, good, or that they did not have issues, respectively. On the other hand, 5% of athletes found their time demands to be poor and 6% struggled to find a balance between their schoolwork and sport. When asked what their most challenging academic experience was as an athlete, one respondent said, "balancing school and sport and coping with schoolwork on the road." Issues with travel demands that come with competing in Division I athletics are well-documented in the literature (Clotfelter, 2019; NCAA GOALS, 2016; Penn Schoen Berland, 2016; Robinson, 2017), but few athletes in this sample explicitly stated travel concerns. Additionally, few questions in the EIS addressed this topic. Future EIS could hone in on this concept and further examine this issue and the relationship it has with athletes' academic experiences as scholars have stated that these demands create challenges for college athletes, particularly regarding academic integration and success (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011) and the quality of their overall educational experience. The positivity expressed by the athletes should be read with caution as the athletes might not know anything different, and this sample is not meant to be generalizable to the academic experiences of all college athletes.

Similarly, others noted that they eventually adjusted to the demands (5%) or that these demands just came with being an athlete (5%). Some examples reflecting these sentiments include: "it wasn't easy, but I made it work" and "it's a lot, but it's part of being a student-athlete." Another fairly common response was the emphasis athletes placed on learning or improving their time management, such as "if you have good time management, it's very possible to get all your work done" and "my time management was a big development." These findings support current literature noting the life skills benefits that come with participating in college athletics, along with the influence these qualities can have when it comes to applying and interviewing for jobs (Chalfin et al., 2015; Harry & Weight, 2019; Weight, Harry, & Navarro, 2020). In fact, research contends that experience as an athlete are viewed by potential

employers to be just as favorable as internship experience by a non-athlete (Dwyer & Gellock, 2018). Some research even finds that former college athlete applicants are more desired by future employers than former fraternity presidents, debate team captains, or school newspaper editors (Chalfin et al., 2015).

These results support the goal, sport, and academic commitments (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011) athletes develop when they find the ability to manage their time and get involved inside and outside of athletics. Time demands and working with athletes to find harmony between their athlete and student roles should be a continued source of focus for athletic departments and leaders. In fact, one athlete advocated for their department to provide more encouragement for athletes on their campus to get more involved in academics and other organizations outside of sports:

> An idea exists among many student athletes that they don't have time for anything past their sport. I think so many people miss out on the opportunity to learn from getting involved in something within athletics or on campus where they are able to lead or organize things and people. If there were more incentives to get involved, either within athletics, in community service, or in organizations that bridge the gap between athletics and the rest of the student body, I think student athletes would really benefit. There is so much I learned from being friends with people outside my team that I've seen many of my friends miss out on by being involved only in the silo of Athletics or believing they don't have time to do anything more.

Using this athlete's voice and suggestions from others to make positive changes for athletes' academic experiences and time demands is one way athletic departments can act on the data gathered through these EIS.

Coach Academic Support

Related to time demands is the influence the coach has through supporting or not supporting athletes' educational efforts. The majority of athletes (n = 311, 90%) asked about the academic support they received from their head coaches noted positive experiences. While many studies and critics have highlighted instances in which coaches emphasized athletics over academics (Jayakumar & Comeaux, 2016; Martin et al., 2010; Singer, 2019), this did not appear to be the case for this sample of athletes. One athlete noted that their coach was "always asking about school" and that they looked to him as an example. Another athlete believed that their coach was "very respectful of time and cool with missing practice for extra credit." The actions of the coaches described above support concepts presented by Comeaux and Harrison (2011) who note that the more positive academic interactions athletes have with their coaches, the more likely they are to find academic success. Thus, the relationship and interactions athletes have with their coaches is likely to have a direct influence on their commitments, integration, and final outputs, such as graduating, attending graduate school, or transitioning out of sport (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Park et al., 2013; Weight, Lewis, & Harry, 2020).

Despite these compliments, 8% of athletes did report that their coaches were not supportive of their academics. For example, one athlete said, "coach doesn't care about time and doesn't allow significant study time on the road." Another athlete discussed that they received a summer internship, but when they told their coach, the coach made them feel guilty for not dedicating that time to athletics. The described lower levels of coach academic support may be due to the commercialized culture of college athletics and pressures placed on coaches, such as winning at all costs and eligibility's importance over education (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011).

Still, most athletes in this sample noted positive experiences with coach support. This is beneficial for the field of intercollegiate athletics as research shows that athletes who have positive relationships and experiences with their coaches develop increased self-efficacy, athletically and academically, which can further enhance the athlete's commitment to their sport and institution (Weight et al., 2020). Additionally, healthy coach-athlete dyads assist the athlete in adapting better to life post sport participation, an important area not expanded upon in Comeaux and Harrison's (2011) conceptual model (Jowett, 2017; Park et al., 2013). Future EIS instruments should ask athletes for more details about this support or lack thereof to facilitate continued academic development of athletes. Additionally, athletic departments should consider increased training for coaches who athletes report within their EIS to be less supportive of educational endeavors, with particular attention paid to the importance of balancing student and athlete roles and social and identity development that occurs in and outside of sport.

Academic Support Programs

Previous studies (Huml et al., 2014; Ridpath, 2010) have discussed the negative influence of academic support services for athletes. However, the sample of athletes in this study offered an opposing perspective in that they found the academic advisors and resources in their programs to be invaluable or even "life savers." Athletes voiced narratives in which their advisors went "above and beyond" or helped them "navigate the entire school system." One participant noted the positive environment they experienced: "The staff is not just about academics they also care about our wellbeing and make sure everything in our lives are going well. We can come talk to people here about anything."

These quotes demonstrate the value athletes find in the academic resources provided by their departments. Similar findings emerged in a study by Rubin and Moses (2017) who noted that athletes in focus groups discussed how vital academic support was for their continued success. Additionally, in a survey of 158 Division I athletes, research by Burns, Jasinski, Dunn, and Fletcher (2013) discovered that positive experiences in these academic support programs resulted in athletes reporting higher academic and career self-efficacy scores. The authors of this study also note that self-efficacy is related to satisfaction, and satisfaction from other research has been linked to academic success (Burns et al., 2013; Comeaux & Harrison, 2011; Tinto, 1975).

Scholarship on athlete experiences also notes the ways in which athlete-only services can further isolate this population from the rest of campus (Huml et al., 2014; Ridpath, 2010), however, no athlete in this study discussed feelings of isolation pertaining to athletic-academic support or facility location. Some scholars believe these services "create a subculture of low academic expectations for athletes (Comeaux, 2015, p. 275) by "hovering" or "handholding" them and focusing on eligibility over education. However, this population's role as both student and athlete and strict time demands may require additional supports in place to ensure academic success (Gayles, 2015; Jolly, 2008; Satterfield et al., 2010). A few athletes did note that they wanted more academic autonomy. When asked to describe their experience with academic counselors/coordinators, one athlete stated, "I didn't feel like I was given enough space to act as an adult," and another mentioned that their advisor was "overbearing at times, but still helpful."

Athletic EIS can be used as an avenue to examine the function of academic support services and their roles in athletes' academic experiences. Comeaux (2015) states that "anecdotes trump evidence" (p. 275) when it comes to decision-making in athlete support programs. However, through EIS, anecdotes can also turn into data utilized by practitioners in these specialized fields to continue to develop practices to assist athletes in their academic endeavors. Knowing athletes' perspectives about these resources can improve their time in college whether that is through increased support or agency. Additionally, the results of this study highlight that the academic support systems in place in this sample of institutions generally offered appropriate levels of challenge and support for their athletes, bolstering the credibility and value of these programs when it comes to fostering positive learning environments in athletes' academic systems and successful outcomes upon departure (Comeaux & Harrison, 2011).

Faculty Support

Athletes also responded to questions about the support they received from faculty, and of those asked about this topic, 80% ($n = 128$) had positive experiences with professors. While faculty perceptions on intercollegiate athletics and athletes are mixed (Lawrence, Hendricks, & Ott, 2007), prominent studies in this area (Comeaux, 2011a, 2011b; Engstrom et al., 1995) highlight the tension between faculty and athletics, paying particular attention to the dumb jock stereotype that many athletes encounter. However, no athlete explicitly stated experiencing negative perceptions or being subjected to this stereotype by faculty. Many athletes noted that professors were helpful and understanding regarding their schedules and potential class conflicts. One athlete mentioned that they created "relationships with professors that will last forever" while another indicated that the professors they developed relationships with were key for assisting in the graduate school application process.

These findings bolster higher education literature noting the benefits of cultivating professor and student/athlete relationships such as cognitive development, critical thinking, social and academic integration, goals for attending professional

school, and overall academic success (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Comeaux & Harrison, 2011). To further support academic-athletic relations, increased faculty involvement in athletes' lives and the athletic decision-making processes should be considered. In a survey of Division I faculty across 23 institutions, Hendricks and colleagues (2007) discovered that 27% of faculty are dissatisfied with attention provided to athletes' education. Thus, increasing faculty engagement in these governance areas, can appease an important campus group while potentially leading to better experiences for college athletes. Indeed, despite the common misconception of faculty being anti-sport, some want to be more involved with their students and athletics (Hendricks et al., 2007). As with coach training, faculty could also receive enhanced education on how to effectively work with this unique college population in ways that both support and challenge their academic growth. With this increased understanding of college athletes, it is likely that even more athletes would report strong relationships with faculty, which would further encourage academic success and success post-graduation.

Limitations & Future Research

A few limitations exist in this study. Access to EIS was limited to documents collected by *The Intercollegiate*. While the documents provide unique insight into the academic experiences of college athletes, understanding the athletes' entire academic experiences was restricted by redactions made by the institution or *The Intercollegiate*. Additionally, the sample size of 17 FBS institutions only represents 14% of all FBS schools. Results are also not generalizable to other levels of competition as it is likely that athletes at other institutions may have different experiences. Conducting later EIS studies within these other levels would provide interesting perspective for the field.

This study did not explore a causal relationship between athlete responses to questions regarding academic experiences, academic services, time demands, and coach and faculty support. Future studies could explore this relationship or examine questions and responses about athletes' social and athletic experiences. Due to the lack of uniformity in EIS, not all athletes in this sample faced questions that addressed all of the topics discussed in this paper. A final limitation stems from the ambiguity associated with race, ethnicity, sex, and sport affiliation of the athlete respondents. A plethora of literature notes the disparate experiences of racial majority versus minoritized athletes, along with differences between sexes and sport status. It is possible that the findings of this study also support this scholarship, but due to anonymity, this information is unknown. Despite these limitations, this study adds a unique data set and new understanding to the intercollegiate athletics literature. Through studying EIS, practitioners can not only appreciate the voices of their athletes, but also better understand their experiences and make enhancements to their educational opportunities.

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Graduate Student-Athletes: An Examination of Identity Roles and Transition

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Graduate student-athletes are increasing in numbers on college and university campuses, though much of the research on student-athletes focuses on undergraduate student populations. This study examines how graduate student-athletes balance their identities as both a student-athlete and as a graduate student. Analysis of the data revealed three major themes: (a) life revolves around sport, (b) graduate student-athlete role conflicts, and (c) preparation for life after sport. Findings suggest that the graduate student-athlete participants in this study used their status as graduate students as a part of a strategy for transition, whereby they began to adopt new roles and routines in preparation for their lives after sport. Implications for practice and policy to support graduate student-athletes are discussed.

Keywords: student-athlete, identity, graduate student, transition

College athletes often encounter challenges when balancing their athlete and student identities (Foster & Huml, 2017; Yopyk & Prentice, 2005). Much of the literature on athletic identity focuses on undergraduate student populations; however, in an increasingly common practice, student-athletes who earn an undergraduate degree are electing to use their remaining athletic eligibility while pursuing a graduate degree. A 2015 survey of Division I athletic programs determined that about 2% of student-athletes were graduate students (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2015). The proportion of graduate student-athletes is greater in revenue-producing sports where strong athletic identity is most prevalent. According to Haslerig (2017), in 2014 approximately 4% of men's basketball and football players were enrolled in post-baccalaureate programs, and football players represented about 36% of graduate student-athletes. The total number of graduate student-athletes nearly doubled from 2007 to 2014 (Haslerig, 2017).

The increased numbers of graduate student-athletes can be attributed in part to the introduction of the 2006 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) graduate transfer rule that allows student-athletes with remaining eligibility to either pursue a graduate degree at their undergraduate institution, or transfer and play immediately at another school (Haslerig, 2017; Martin, 2008). Other changes such as increased academic support, due in part to the adoption of the NCAA Academic

Progress Rate (APR) policy in 2003 (National Collegiate Athletic Association, n.d.), have also increased the numbers of graduate student-athletes. The trend suggests that numbers of graduate student-athletes will continue to increase. However, little is known about the graduate student-athlete experience, and it stands to reason that graduate student-athletes may face more challenges related to balancing their student and athlete identities than their undergraduate counterparts.

In order for universities to better serve this unique population, more research is needed. The purpose of this study is to examine how graduate student-athletes balance their identities as graduate student and intercollegiate athlete. In this context, we explore how student-athletes arrive at the decision to pursue graduate study, challenges they face when the role demands of their dual identities conflict, and strategies they use to manage their expectations of themselves as athletes and graduate students.

Background and Literature

Each year in the United States, over 460,000 students participate in intercollegiate sports (Lu, Heinze, & Soderstrom, 2018). Because of the often intense time demands of athletics, their dual roles in college are often in direct conflict (Adler & Adler, 1987; Lu et al., 2018; Settles, Sellers, & Damas, 2002; Wendling, Kellison, & Sagas, 2018). The intercollegiate athletic experience requires the student-athlete to participate in at least 20 hours of athletic-related activities per week, whereas their studies often require that much time or more.

Athletic self-identity has been defined as "the degree to which an individual thinks and feels like an athlete" (Gustafsson, Martinent, Isoard-Gautheur, Hassmén, & Guillet-Descas, 2018, p. 56). According to Marcia (1993), in order for a person to develop their overall identity, they must explore potential roles and related behaviors, which then lead to a personal decision about a chosen identity. Thereafter, an individual develops a belief system, investment in the development of skills, and a commitment to a given occupation or sport. Because intercollegiate athletic participation requires a great deal of time, some student-athletes are restricted in exploring identities outside of sport. A typology of student-athletes has been developed that consists of four main groups, including scholar-athletes who are committed to both athletic and academic roles, pure athletes, pure scholars, and those who do not demonstrate commitment to either (Snyder, 1985).

Athletic Identity and Academic Experience

Athletic identity has a strong impact on the ability of a student-athlete to thrive in the classroom. Either the student identity or the athletic identity can take precedence for a given student-athlete (Lu et al., 2018). Those with higher levels of athletic identity may select less rigorous majors, engage less with course material, and experience less academic success than those with higher levels of academic identity. Student-athletes feel most like students when they are engaged in academic tutoring

or spending time at academic centers for athletes, and most like athletes when on the field or while wearing athletic gear on campus (Lu et al., 2018). Over the course of a student-athlete's career, the athletic portion of their dual role takes on more importance than the student role (Adler & Adler, 1987).

Athletes on a men's basketball team that competed in a major conference, and who had high levels of athletic identity, selected majors that they perceived to be more conducive to their team obligations (Adler & Adler, 1987). Because student-athletes must juggle their athletic and academic obligations, many experience role conflict. Additionally, the label "dumb jocks" adds to their role conflict and self-perceptions of their ability to succeed (Adler & Adler, 1987). NCAA academic eligibility requirements require a full-time course load of at least 12 hours per semester and good academic standing in order to compete, so the student and athlete roles are interdependent (Wendling et al., 2018). To resolve role conflict, some athletes, especially those in revenue-producing sports, reduce or even abandon their academic role (Adler & Adler, 1987).

Despite the clear pressures of the dual role, many student-athletes have positive academic experiences. Previous literature has demonstrated that student-athletes have higher graduation rates, higher levels of academic adjustment, better health outcomes, higher levels of adherence to authority, greater levels of character development, enhanced self-esteem and confidence, and enhanced institutional attachment compared to their non-athlete peers (Melendez, 2006). Other benefits of athletic participation include decreased feelings of loneliness and stress among first-year students (Chen, Snyder, & Magner, 2010; Miller & Kerr, 2003). Previous research indicated that participation in amateur sport could lead to higher levels of attendance in graduate school and overall lifetime earnings (Coakley, 1983).

Other studies have highlighted the negative impacts of intercollegiate athletic participation on student-athletes. Problems such as lack of social interaction with non-team members, substance abuse, depression, violent behavior, and disordered eating have been found to plague some college athletes (Bacon & Russell, 2004; Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993; Chen et al., 2010; Fields, Collins, & Comstock, 2007; Jolly, 2008; Miller & Kerr, 2003; Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2018). Some scholars have determined that student-athletes have a more difficult time succeeding in the classroom than their non-athlete peers. For example, student-athletes were viewed by their peers as less intelligent and less capable of succeeding in college than non-athletes (Sailes, 1993). Some studies have shown that student-athletes in revenue sports in particular struggle in the classroom. Men who compete in revenue-producing sports such as football and basketball are outperformed by non-athletes in the classroom (Pascarella, Truckenmiller, Nora, Terenzini, Edison, & Hagedorn, 1999).

Women have been found to have higher levels of student identity salience than men (Harrison et al., 2009; Sturm, Feltz, & Gilson, 2011). Women overall, and men who compete in non-revenue sports, were statistically similar to non-athletes in terms of academic performance. Overall, women who compete on top athletic teams perform significantly better academically than men at the same level of athletic per-

formance (Bailey & Bhattacharyya, 2017). Further, student-athletes who compete at elite levels and who are successful academically share various traits that enable them to flourish in both roles. For example, female student-athletes had higher self-esteem and transformational leadership characteristics than their non-athlete peers (Galante & Ward, 2017). It is plausible that student-athletes who possess both elite athletic prowess and the innate characteristics that allow them to succeed in the classroom end up as graduate student-athletes (Bailey & Bhattacharyya, 2017).

Students whose identities center on athletics are more likely to seek degrees that are less demanding and more conducive to high levels of focus on athletic obligations. This phenomenon is typically described in the literature as clustering, in which a large percentage (typically greater than 25%) of student-athletes on one team major in a particular subject at a given institution (Fountain & Finley, 2011; Haslerig & Navarro, 2016; Schneider, Ross, & Fisher, 2010). Academic clustering leads to limited career options for athletes, particularly those in revenue-producing sports. To combat potential negative outcomes associated with academic clustering, Haslerig and Navarro (2016) recommended that athletes receive strong support for career planning and career development in their undergraduate years, especially as they consider further education after college. That said, other studies (Chen et al., 2010; Lally & Kerr, 2005; Miller & Kerr, 2003) found that during the latter years of college, student-athletes' focus shifts more towards their academic identity.

Athletic Identity and Athletic Retirement

While in general the literature suggests that participation in collegiate athletics leads to positive outcomes, athletes with strong levels of athletic identity were less academically successful than those with lower levels (Hale & Waalkes, 1994). Strong athletic identity is also associated with lower levels of career maturity and burnout (Hale & Waalkes, 1994; Foster & Huml, 2017). A strong student-athlete identity can be problematic as graduation approaches, as can the daunting prospect of transitioning away from athletic identity. Student-athletes reported the retirement process to be difficult when they did not have well-developed options for life after sport (Mihovilovic, 1968). To combat negative outcomes associated with high levels of athletic identity, it has been suggested that the college adjustment experience for student-athletes include the development of a balanced academic and personal identity in addition to athletic pursuits (Melendez, 2006).

Because athletic participation requires a great deal of time, role conflict between being a student and an athlete is often present (Adler & Adler, 1991). Those with a strong athletic identity are more likely to experience negative ramifications during college (Foster & Huml, 2017). This effect was most pronounced among student-athletes who believed athletic performance was the only portion of their identity that mattered. Emotional and psychological difficulties are often experienced by retiring athletes, leading to depression, anxiety, substance abuse, decreased self-confidence, and in some instances, eating disorders (Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Ogilvie & Howe, 1982; Sinclair & Orlick, 1993; Svoboda & Vanek, 1982). Athletes have been reported to lose their sense of self upon retirement (Lally, 2007), and this phenomenon is

particularly problematic for athletes with high levels of athletic identity (Adler & Adler, 1987). Those athletes who deemphasize their athletic identity and place additional importance on their academic identity and future career have an easier time with the retirement transition (Lally, 2007).

The literature on graduate student-athlete identity is sparse. However, two notable pieces relate to the current study. Participants in a study of 11 graduate student-athletes who competed in Division I football made conscious efforts to distance themselves from negative stereotypes such as the "dumb jock" label (Haslerig, 2017) study. Participants stated that graduate courses provided them with the opportunity to prove to their peers that they were capable of thriving intellectually at the graduate level. Other graduate student-athletes discussed initially being unaware of the opportunity to pursue graduate education with their remaining eligibility. Haslerig recommended a concerted effort to inform all undergraduate student-athletes of the possibility of enrolling in graduate school, in order to both overcome the information barrier and to shift the culture of teams toward academic achievement. Other recommendations included changing the language used to describe graduate student-athletes away from the "fifth-year athlete" label, and to increase dialogue among coaches, academic success professionals, and players regarding graduate student-athletes' successes in the classroom.

Once athletes become graduate students, they explore academic pursuits more freely than in their undergraduate years (Haslerig & Navarro, 2016; this finding conflicts with participant data in the current study, as some indicated that they selected a graduate program based on its perceived fit with their athletic obligations). The participants in their study reported that they had to work hard to overcome barriers created by their academic commitments so they would have time to pursue non-athletic interests and social activities. These graduate student-athletes reported that they chose their graduate program because it fit with their career interests, they were intellectually curious about the topic, or a combination of the two. The same students felt well-equipped to assist their undergraduate student-athlete peers and capable of navigating academic support systems. The authors determined that graduate student-athletes had high levels of self-efficacy. One implication of their study was that in order for the population of graduate student-athletes to grow, information must be shared with undergraduate student-athletes.

Despite these scholarly contributions, more research on graduate student-athlete identity is necessary in order to truly understand the unique population. Understanding the process of identity balance will enable the creation of policies and practices that support student-athletes in their transition from undergraduate to graduate student and later away from sport and school. The current study is such a contribution.

Theoretical Perspectives

To frame our study, we turned to the perspectives provided by role strain theory (Goode, 1960) and adult transition theory (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). Role strain theory asserts that social institutions depend on role relationships, that in-

dividual identity consists of multiple roles, and that an individual's cumulative roles almost always exceed their ability to meet them all satisfactorily. Thus individuals prioritize various role demands over others, a phenomenon referred to as role strain (Goode, 1960). The prioritization of role demands can become difficult when the various role demands conflict with one another or compete for time and resources. Consider, for example, a graduate student-athlete who is required to travel to an away tournament during the semester when classes are held. When these situations occur, Goode suggested that individuals employ coping strategies, some of which may be dysfunctional, to justify their prioritization of role demands.

The process of transition has been described by identifying the ways in which individuals cope or adjust to change (Schlossberg et al., 1995). The four factors that influence the success of the transition process (termed the 4 S system) are the external context (*situation*) and the individual (*self*) together with the resources available to them (*support*) and the effectiveness of the individual's utilization of the supports provided (*strategies*). The ideas posited by Goode (1960) in role strain theory and Schlossberg et al. (1995) in adult transition theory helped the authors make meaning of the data in the generation of themes, and also provided perspective in the interpretation of these themes and discussion.

Methodology

This study is a multisite (two universities) case study, bounded by time and by participant criteria described below (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Merriam, 2009). We explored the identity-balancing process of student-athletes from a subjectivist lens. That is, we wished to give voice to the experiences and reality of our participants (Patton, 2002).

Participants and Site Selection

All participants met the pre-determined criteria of being Division I scholarship student-athletes enrolled in their first year of a graduate level degree. Two participants (Grady and Kenzie) attended University A, a pseudonym for a public 4-year, Division I institution located in the southeastern United States. The remaining four participants attended University B, a pseudonym for a public 4-year, Division I institution located in the midwestern United States. Table 1 includes demographic information for all participants.

Participant recruitment occurred in several ways. First, administrators from selected athletic conferences were asked for lists, with contact information, of participants who fit the criteria. Those students were contacted via email to determine their interest and availability in participating in the study. Second, athletic directors at selected universities were contacted and asked to share information regarding the study with student-athletes who met the criteria. Finally, potential participants were solicited via a national conference presentation where preliminary findings from initial participants were shared. These strategies resulted in a total pool of six graduate student-athletes from two different institutions who agreed to participate in the study. These six student-athletes represented a variety of sports, both revenue and non-revenue, and were diverse in race and gender.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Pseudonym	Graduate Program	Program Type	Graduate Program Institution	Semesters In Program	Gender Identity	Racial/Ethnic Identity	Sport
Grady	Criminal Justice	Online	Undergraduate Institution	3	Male	White/ Hispanic	Basketball
Kenzie	MBA-Accounting	Face to Face	Undergraduate Institution	1	Female	White	Volleyball
Adam	Sport Administration	Online	Transfer Institution	2	Male	Black	Baseball
Terrell	Sport Administration	Online	Undergraduate Institution	2	Male	Black	Basketball
Evan	Sport Administration	Online	Undergraduate Institution	2	Male	White	Football
Erin	Sport Administration	Online	Transfer Institution	3	Female	Black	Basketball

Data Collection

Given the intent of this study to understand the perspectives of the participants, rich descriptive interviews were deemed the most appropriate way to collect data (Patton, 2002). The students took part in in-person, one-on-one, semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Interviews were conducted during the spring and summer of 2019. With participant consent, all interviews were recorded and transcribed by a researcher-trained graduate assistant. Relevant documents, including policies regarding student-athletes, graduate student program descriptions, and curricula were obtained for analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis took place in two phases. In phase one, researchers conducted interviews with two participants and obtained relevant documents at University A. After these interviews were recorded and transcribed, researchers carried out the constant comparison method of analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). First transcripts were read and re-read to generate initial, or open, codes. This process produced over 400 open codes. For instance, two examples of open codes were "sport all life" and "always knew wanted to play". At the completion of this process, associations between codes were identified, a process known as axial coding. During the axial phase open codes were reduced to an average of 26 associated concepts or ideas. To take the example of the open codes identified previously, "sport all life" and "always knew wanted to play" were linked together as related concepts because of the mention of sport always being a part of the students' lives. When differences of opinion in data interpretation emerged, the researchers met to resolve those differences. Finally, after three rounds, the axial codes and concepts were collapsed into overarching themes. The aforementioned open and axial codes eventually became a part of the first theme "life revolves around sport". Once formed, the themes were cross-referenced with documents, including student-athlete academic policies and graduate study program and curriculum descriptions, to generate a more complete understanding of the student-athletes' experiences within the context of their institution. The themes that emerged from the data were examined through the lenses of the theoretical perspectives guiding this study. That is, as findings emerged we considered the data in the context of the ideas posited by Goode (1960) in role strain theory and Schlossberg et al. (1995) in adult transition theory. These ideas helped us generate themes and provided perspective for the interpretation of these themes and discussion.

Phase two of the analysis took place two months after phase one. Once new data from University B were collected and interviews transcribed, the researchers continued the constant comparison method of analysis, where the new data were considered and compared with existing themes to confirm and corroborate the findings.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Several measures were taken to enhance trustworthiness and credibility of the findings and interpretation. We used several of the eight validation strategies for qualitative research recommended by Creswell and Poth (2018). First, our two-step data

analysis approach allowed the time and space for peer review. Preliminary findings were presented at a national conference, and conference session attendees provided feedback and initial thoughts on the themes and interpretations. Second, our one-on-one semi-structured interviews generated rich, thick descriptions of participant experiences. Finally, we triangulated both the researchers and the data. Three researchers were involved in the analysis process. Researchers one and three conducted interviews, and researchers one and two carried out the coding process. This approach allowed for an internal check in which one researcher was involved in both interviews and coding, one was involved in only coding, and the third did not code but verified the coding was consistent with their interpretation from the interview process. The two researchers involved in the coding process individually reviewed transcripts and then came together to discuss interpretation of codes and themes and resolve any differences. Use of multiple sources of data including institutional policies, program descriptions, and curricula as well as interview data provided additional opportunity for triangulation. For example, several participants mentioned how travel as an athlete affected their graduate student responsibilities. As we interpreted our findings, we consulted institutional policies on student-athlete related travel and academics to contextualize the students' reported experiences.

Findings

Analysis of the data revealed three major themes: (a) life revolves around sport, (b) graduate student-athlete role conflicts, and (c) preparation for life after sport. These themes are explored in more detail here.

Life Revolves Around Sport

For these graduate student-athletes, sport was the center of their lives. All six participants shared that they had always known they had wanted to play their sport, and thus sought opportunities and schools that would allow them to pursue their passion while also earning their degree. As Grady explained in his opening sentence, "[I] always knew I wanted to play basketball." Similarly, Kenzie opened her interview by sharing "I always knew I wanted to play Division I." When asked to describe their typical day, all participants detailed highly regimented schedules that revolved around their sport. These days included activities such as weights, practice, rehabilitation, stretching, talking with coaches, eating to fuel their bodies for performance, or in some cases, hanging out with teammates at the gym or using the locker room facilities to get ready for their day. Several students shared that they used space around the athletic facilities for studying. As Erin explained:

> I'll go up to my coach's office and there's a room, the conference meeting room. I'm sitting in the conference meeting room for three hours and just . . . I have to be away from my home, so I'm not laying in my bed . . . being away from everything and it's quiet.

These examples point to the importance of the role of the athlete and illustrate how athletic identity manifests in these student-athletes' lives.

However, the athlete role differentiates these students from typical graduate students. Reminiscent of the phenomenon of academic clustering (Fountain & Finley, 2011; Haslerig & Navarro, 2016; Schneider et al., 2010), several of our participants indicated that their graduate program was not their original choice for study, but was selected because they felt it would be more compatible with their athletic demands. For instance, Adam originally planned to pursue a Masters of Business Administration (MBA) but decided against doing so: "I'm probably glad that I didn't [pursue an MBA] just with baseball cause I felt like it would have been a lot. . . . I think it would have been too rigorous and too difficult to deal with baseball season starting now." Grady originally wanted to pursue a master's degree in Social Work, but decided against it because of the internship requirements "I was thinking Social Work actually first . . . that's what I was going to try to do first, but with the internships that you had to do, it wasn't really possible while I was playing . . . and so obviously I couldn't." Grady eventually selected a master's degree in Criminal Justice, as he felt the online nature of the program would allow him the flexibility he needed. Half of our participants noted they had originally planned to pursue a different degree, but ultimately decided on a program they deemed compatible with the demands of their sport.

Of our six participants, five were enrolled in online programs. For some, athletic advisors encouraged them to pursue their degree online, while others, like Grady, individually concluded that online offerings would best accommodate their busy schedules. While online programs brought flexibility, some of our participants expressed that they found the online format to be challenging, and they felt they might have selected a face-to-face format if not simultaneously pursuing sport. For example, Adam cited the online format of his classes as his biggest challenge:

> The online aspect is probably the biggest challenge, because I love to ask questions and I love to get clarity on things . . . it's not as timely so if I have a question or a concern . . . you kind of have to send an email and then wait until the instructor emails you back.

These additional examples indicate the importance of the role of "athlete" for these students. Not only day to day decisions and schedules, but also major life decisions such as which graduate program to pursue, were based on the expectations and demands of their sport. Of our participants, half noted they had originally planned to pursue a different degree, but ultimately decided on a program they deemed compatible with the demands of their sport. While some of the time our participants were able to accommodate both athletic and scholarly demands, there were some instances where these two roles came into conflict and created strain, the second theme of this study.

Graduate Student-Athlete Role Conflicts

Our participants reflected on several aspects of graduate study that they felt were in conflict with the expectations of their athletic demands. For instance, several participants noted that they were assigned more group projects in graduate school than they were during their undergraduate programs, and that group work could be challenging particularly when they were expected to work together with classmates during their athletic season when they were also traveling. Kenzie explained:

> There are group presentations in my managerial accounting class and there's basically three days you can present and I was going to be gone on two of those days . . . so I had to tell my group, 'like I can really only present on the middle day' . . . but it's just tough in master's classes, there's so much group work . . . and you may have a group that doesn't understand . . . and [part of your grade] is based on peer evaluations.

Adam, who was in an online program, corroborated Kenzie's identification of group work as a challenge as a graduate student-athlete: "We have a couple of group projects and it's kind of difficult to work in a group." Evan also talked about the increased number of group projects in his graduate program as compared to his undergraduate work. When asked about the major differences between undergraduate and graduate study he replied: "There's just more to pay attention to . . . just like the projects and things. I'm in like four group projects right now and that never really happened in undergrad."

Group work was only one aspect of graduate school that participants noted as a challenge to balancing their roles as graduate students and athletes. Traveling was commonly mentioned as one of the biggest sources of role conflict. Many of the participants talked about being proactive as a strategy to balance competing demands of sport and school, but that at times the conflict was unavoidable. Grady described this process as learning how to "edit your life" as he shared a story about being behind in his graduate work while traveling for basketball:

> One time we were on a long road trip, and it was a week where we had a lot of reading, a lot of reading, and I actually wasn't able to get it all done, and then we were traveling the next week . . . we were in Mexico for a tournament . . . and so it was a couple weeks in a row where it all kind of piled on me and I didn't have a lot of time to catch up because we were so busy with basketball and in that moment instead of getting so worried about grad school . . . I had to put that aside and be like ok, I'm at a tournament right now and there's nothing I can do about that right now . . . if I'm overstressing about school then I'm not gonna do what I need to do for the basketball team.

Grady expanded on this point by saying, "[Being a graduate athlete] is obviously harder than undergrad . . . with how hectic the season can get . . . like this week we had three games and seven days we were traveling . . . with missing classes . . . I

was scared about that." Kenzie also mentioned travel as the hardest part of balancing sport and graduate study, particularly because of the way her graduate classes were scheduled. As is typical of many graduate programs that are intended to accommodate working professionals, her classes met in the evenings, with less frequent meetings and longer class meetings than undergraduate offerings. Kenzie expressed that when she missed class because of travel it was difficult for her to catch up on the material. Moreover, many of her classes were seminar style in nature, and could not be replicated or "caught up":

> The hardest parts were travel . . . travel weekends or travel days . . . um like on Thursdays. . . . We're risking a lot of Thursday classes . . . that's usually when you miss because that's when you travel for the weekends . . . I missed 12 Thursday classes this fall . . . miss 12 classes and that's like your whole semester . . . that's really tough.

Several participants also spoke about how the standards for success in graduate school as compared to undergraduate study added to their pressure as a graduate student-athlete. For the participants in this study, to remain in good standing as a graduate student required no less than a "B" average, and grades below a "B" could jeopardize their status in the program. In contrast, in their undergraduate programs grades of "C" were acceptable. Evan confirmed this point:

> I was gonna mention that, the grade . . . you can't get below a B right . . . and then you have one B minus I think . . . that's definitely . . . it puts more pressure . . . I like it because it's honestly made me more attentive to making sure that I'm not just passing through . . . like I actually know what I'm doing . . . not just like getting through it because you can get through it with a C like a lot of people would do that.

Erin also indicated that as a graduate student she felt she was held to higher standards than her undergraduate teammates and was expected to set an example for them: "It's a different standard that [my coach] will hold me to, and she's just like I'm teaching you differently." She expanded on this point by sharing that her status as a graduate student-athlete led her to feel accountable in the example she set for her teammates:

> You're held to a different standard in the master's program . . . I don't wanna, me as a person, a leader and one of the older people on the team, I don't want to be called out at all in a huddle because I have a C in this class and I'm not supposed to . . . that's a new challenge for me, accountability.

While at times she indicated she was resentful of the amount of work she put into setting a good example through success in her graduate program, she also noted that she embraced her new leadership role because she recognized her personal transformation:

> It's funny because my team looks to me as a mom, and I've never been that . . . it was just that transition, from being like the team clown to being the team mom instead . . . I've kind of grown into the role they've given me.

Erin's recognition of her personal transformation through her adoption of new roles with corresponding role demands foreshadowed her process of preparation for her life after sport, the third theme of this study.

Life after Sport

Each of our participants detailed, in their own way, how they intended to prepare for life after sport. Several participants directly discussed that pursuing a graduate degree played a large part in their transition. Terrell explained that when he was a freshman, he was hesitant to take on too much academic responsibility so he could "have fun" in college, but changed his perspective to "take advantage" of the opportunity to earn a master's degree while still playing basketball.

> Coming from high school, I'm like man, I'm in college, [I am gonna]have fun . . . but as I got here, got wise – I guess older, I realized what I really have in front of me . . . I'm like yeah [I am gonna] take advantage of it, [I am gonna] do it, [I am gonna] get it . . . when I'm done playing sports...I still wanna be around sports.

Terrell was not the only participant whose views on graduate study shifted. Several other participants expressed that they originally pursued graduate study only to continue playing their sport, but that as they progressed through their program they began to view it as an opportunity to transition out of sport into the "real world". Kenzie shared: "I still have eligibility left in volleyball, but I finished my undergraduate program . . . I have to take classes to play volleyball." Despite her admission of pursuing her degree to allow her to continue her sport, when asked if she would continue her degree if her eligibility were to end, she said she would finish and that she credited her graduate program with helping her to network for future job opportunities: "I've gotten to meet a lot of people who all have like real jobs that I can then be like, hey I haven't worked, can I, can you help me out . . . which will be nice." Similarly, Grady talked about the desire to play as long as possible as the driving factor behind his decision to pursue further education, but acknowledged his belief that a graduate degree would serve him better for his long-term goals than would additional undergraduate coursework: "I want to play basketball for as long as I can, but after that . . . I wanted to do something that was going to help me later on . . . just having a master's in general is going to help you later on . . . like when I have to get a real job."

These examples indicate that these graduate student-athletes viewed their sport as their job, and in some ways they felt their position as a graduate student-athlete was helping in their transition to life after sport. But in other ways, they felt the time

required by their sport was interfering with their ability to take full advantage of the opportunities they felt their classmates had. Adam explained: "I feel like most graduates have jobs . . . they work outside of school . . . [if not an athlete] I think I would designate more time to be social and more time to my career instead of baseball." Kenzie described the difference between herself and her graduate classmates:

> All my classmates work all day . . . it's a little different for me cause I don't work cause I have to work out instead . . . the very first week, like introduce yourself, where do you work . . . I'm like I don't have a job, but I'm a student-athlete so I promise I'm doing something . . . all I know is sports plus academic so it's just kind of different because I don't have a job.

Kenzie went on to talk about how it was difficult for her to pursue internships, which she considered to be the typical route to career entry for her profession:

> Trying to find a job while being a student-athlete and internship, especially in an internship-heavy career field, has been really tough, because they'll want you to work tax season . . . but I can't because I'm in season . . . so I'd have to work [my internship] at 5am [or] 10pm, and nobody works then.

She explained that in lieu of the typical internship route, she intended to rely on her experience as a student-athlete to help her stand out among job applicants:

> Being an athlete does hold some weight like resume-wise, that sort of thing. A lot of employers understand like this is how I get through school and that I am busy . . . I think that if I can market myself as being an athlete . . . that will help me through the fact that I didn't have a job or internship throughout college.

Erin also talked about not being able to take advantage of all the opportunities available to her due to the time demands of her athletics:

> I envy people who can just focus on school because they are able to, um they have more opportunity and more time to network [at] any events that are being held . . . I always get emails from my teachers about, oh there's this going on and you can come network with us, and listen to so-and-so speak. Those are things I'm not able to partake in.

Like Kenzie, Erin reconciled this perceived disadvantage by using the athletic experience as a training ground for her future. She alluded to this strategy when she explained:

> When you're a student-athlete in the graduate program . . . not everyone is doing this . . . I think you're then . . . a little more mature . . . [it is known that] this next step is you jumping into the real world . . . I've learned so much just this year,

> being on this program . . . about people skills, social skills . . . on and off the course . . . it was like a job for us . . . I think that your resume automatically goes to the top but I think you have to keep it up there, it doesn't stay there because you're a student-athlete . . . it's on you what you've learned, so they have to see [what] did you take away from all these years you were a student-athlete.

These students' experiences and words revealed some of the strategies they were utilizing to prepare for their transition away from sport and school.

Discussion

This study investigated how graduate student-athletes negotiate identity and transition. Using role strain theory and transition theory as theoretical lenses provided perspective on the graduate student-athlete identity negotiation process, and shaped how we made meaning of the findings. Three key themes emerged: (a) life revolves around sport, (b) graduate student-athlete role conflicts, and (c) preparation for life after sport.

Participants in this study possessed a strong sense of athletic identity, especially when they initially entered their graduate degree programs. Their athletic identity was evidenced in their day-to-day time commitment to their sport and the way in which they described prioritizing sport over opportunities such as networking that were provided to them as graduate students. Perhaps the most obvious display of strong athletic identity was participants' choice to pursue graduate study in the first place, tempered by consideration of their athletic demands as a major factor in their choice of program of study (It should also be noted that several participants talked about how their athletic advisors influenced their choice of graduate program of study). From a role theory perspective, it is plausible that these student-athletes felt the pull of their athletic identity role demands with such gravitas that the result was that they felt compelled to make future shaping decisions (e.g., graduate program selection) that were compatible with their athletic identity. From a transition theory perspective, this phenomenon may be evidence of graduate student-athlete transition embracing *strategies*, or the utilization of available support. However, athletic advisors are not necessarily equipped with training for career counseling. In her study of undergraduate student-athletes, Navarro (2015) warned that, without proper training, athletic student support staff may inadvertently promote academic clustering, in which student-athletes are grouped in the same majors. While this can be problematic at the undergraduate level, graduate programs provide more specialized training that is often intended for specific associated careers. Thus, relying on an athletic advisor for advice on selection of a graduate program may have long-term negative consequences for students as they prepare to transition out of sport and into a career.

The finding that graduate student-athletes select graduate programs based on their athletic demands, as opposed to opting for the most applicable program for their future career interests, and that sometimes this choice is influenced by athletic advisors, demonstrates one way in which graduate student-athletes are different

from other graduate student populations. Thus, the need is evident to better support graduate student-athletes' decision-making for success in the long term, not just for the duration of their athletic eligibility. Moreover, several participants noted the differences between their undergraduate and graduate studies. Overall, they pointed to several ways in which their graduate experience was different from their undergraduate experience (e.g., more group work, seminar style classes, expectation for autonomy and self-directed learning). In a study on graduate student sense of belonging, Pascale (2018) found some fundamental differences between graduate and undergraduate student experience that contribute to graduate students understanding and operationalizing their sense of belonging differently than they did as undergraduate students. For example, regarding the role of friendships, Pascale's participants noted that undergraduate student's friendships tended to have more of a social focus, whereas graduate friendships revolved around shared academic interests. This study confirms and extends Pascale's findings to graduate student-athlete identity. That is, while athletic identity exists for graduate student-athletes, it appears to be operationally different from undergraduate athletic identity.

Indeed, much of the literature on student-athletes and athletic identity examines undergraduate populations. This literature largely suggests that students who possess strong athletic identity may have a difficult time transitioning out of sport, particularly if they do not have a defined plan for post-baccalaureate life (Melendez, 2006; Mihovilovic, 1968). However, as participants in this study progressed in their graduate programs, many highlighted the ways their program was helping them to prepare for life after sport. In analyzing these graduate student-athletes' words, it became apparent that, whether intentionally or not, participants were utilizing their graduate program of study as a transition strategy, a means to prepare them for what several participants termed the "real world". While they may have entered their graduate programs with a strong athletic identity, they recognized and embraced being "held to a different standard" in their sport, among their teammates, and also in the classroom. Acknowledging the differences between themselves and their teammates may have allowed space for them to dissociate from the notion that their contributions were only athletic, and thus more successfully prepare for transition away from sport. Previous research corroborates these ideas: for example, Melendez (2006) suggested that it is important that student-athletes form a balanced identity to aid in successful transition out of sport.

It has been suggested that graduate student status allows student-athletes added space to fully explore their academic pursuits (Haslerig & Navarro, 2016). Connecting these ideas with those presented in this study, we postulate that the space provided to more fully explore academic pursuits in graduate school allows for the development of a more balanced identity, which in turn aids in successful transition out of sport. From this perspective, we conclude that pursuit of graduate study may serve as a catalyst for transition, and that perhaps not intentionally, but rather more organically, student-athletes' graduate school experience becomes part of their strategy for transition.

Some limitations of this study should be noted. First, only six athletes participated, and although they were enrolled at two different institutions, the institutions are similar in size and mission. Thus, because institutional contexts likely influence the experiences of the participants, and to some extent shape their identity and transition, graduate student-athletes enrolled in institutions different from the two in this study may have different experiences. Second, our study includes graduate student-athletes in several different sports, and it is likely that factors including the level of support provided to that sport by the university, whether or not the sport is revenue-producing, and background demographics such as gender and race affect the student-athlete experience. These differences are not addressed in this study, but should be investigated in future research.

Implications and Recommendations

Findings from this study have important implications for practice and policy. From the reflections provided through these student-athletes' experiences, graduate school can offer an important space for natural transition out of sport and school. However, many of the students indicated that they were not able to take advantage of opportunities that could have expedited the identity-balancing process. We recommend that athletic and academic administrators and coaches work together to create opportunities for graduate student-athletes to substitute for experiences that they may not be able to participate in as a result of their time commitment to their sport. Such experiences could take the form of introductions and scheduled networking time with professionals in their field of study, or pre-arranged one-on-one or small group time with professors to promote mentorship relationships. For students who select sport administration or a related master's program, graduate assistantships could be an effective way for graduate students to take on increased responsibilities and broader roles, which could facilitate a shift in identity and smooth transition to the career side of sport. Additionally, findings from this study could be used by academic advisors, coaches, and recruiters to begin to work more closely with graduate program faculty to successfully recruit and support graduate student-athletes who show potential for a successful transition away from sport and school.

Conclusion

This study examines identity negotiation and transition of graduate student-athletes. Three themes surfaced: (a) life revolves around sport, (b) graduate student-athlete role conflicts, and (c) preparation for life after sport. Analysis of these themes revealed that the graduate student-athlete participants in this study used their status as graduate students as a part of a strategy for transition, whereby they began to adopt new roles and routines in preparation for their lives after sport. University administrators, coaches, and faculty should encourage graduate study for student-athletes and continue to seek ways to support graduate student-athletes in their identity transition process.

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The Circle of Unity: The power of symbols in a team sport context

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Modern-day political discord has led to a recent spate of athletes using their platform to make statements about America. One under-researched aspect to modern sport activism is the study of the symbols themselves, such as the controversial kneeling during the national anthem by National Football League players, statement-making pregame apparel worn by National Basketball Association stars, and other political statements. This case study examines a 2016 activist display by Old Dominion University's football team, known as the Circle of Unity. The display, performed before most games that season, began as a form of protest by team captains, and morphed into a gesture that was celebrated across the political spectrum. Through the lens of both Symbolic Interactionism (SI) and Critical Race Theory (CRT), the current study seeks to uncover the impetus, meaning, and ultimate impact of the symbol on a variety of stakeholders. Examining the symbol used—players and coaches standing in a circle, facing out, holding hands and raising them to the sky—can further contextualize the challenging role that student-athletes have in finding their voice to speak on issues they care about in a divided America.

Keywords: athlete activism, politics in sport, symbolic interactionism, college football, Old Dominion University

Fans arriving for the kickoff of Old Dominion University's (ODU) football game against the University of Texas-San Antonio (UTSA) on September 24, 2016 were greeted with a curious sight. A few minutes before kickoff, fans witnessed ODU mingling in the stadium's north end zone, and after a few minutes of discussion, players and coaches fanned out in a circle around the end zone, clasping hands with the individual on both sides of them (Minium, 2016a). When the circle was complete, the players lifted their arms up over their heads in unison. Fans, initially confused at the gesture, eventually started a round of applause that grew in intensity as it continued. Immediately following the gesture, the players returned to their benches and the game began.

Following the game, fans and media learned of the rationale for the gesture, termed the "Circle of Unity" (COU). ODU head coach Bobby Wilder explained that his team's captains approached him the week prior to the game, expressing their

feelings of unease and discord about the shooting by police of a Black male, Keith Lamont Scott, who died after being shot four times by a Charlotte police officer (Yan, Zenteno, & Todd, 2016). This was the latest in a series of violent incidents involving police and Black men in America. The COU became a symbol in which ODU football players (and sometimes their opponents) could express their displeasure with societal injustices while maintaining the team's desire to create unity among the country. While an important gesture that permeated throughout the 2016 season, the COU was just the latest demonstration among athletes in recent years.

After the immense contributions and sacrifices by athletes such as Muhammad Ali, Tommie Smith, and John Carlos (Carlos & Zirin, 2011), there was a noticeable decline of evocative political statements by athletes for several decades (Khan, 2012). In fact, sociologist and civil rights activist Dr. Harry Edwards (2016a) referred to the period between the 1970s and 2005 as a period of Black athletic activism "stagnation." In the early part of the 21st century, however, athletes have become more outspoken, motivated in part by the most prominent recent case of athlete activism—a series of National Football League (NFL) player demonstrations during the Star-Spangled Banner (Reilly, 2016), which spread throughout the League during the 2016 and 2017 seasons. This ignited a national conversation that continued for several years. Other activist displays included the decision of championship teams or individual team members choosing not to make the traditional White House visit (Shear, 2018), and the increasingly outspoken nature of renowned athletes such as LeBron James (James & Lombardo, 2016), Steph Curry (Dowd, 2016), and Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) players (Schmidt, 2018). Activism has also been seen at the college level with recent college athlete protests occurring at Grambling State University (Schroeder, 2013) and the University of Missouri (Yan et al., 2018). Many of the aforementioned examples stem from issues around tense and ever-present racial issues in America.

Besides exposing societal fault lines that cause individuals in society to pick sides, these high-profile statements have frequently been linked by something else—the use of symbols to convey a message. Such use of symbols was intended to motivate and organize behavior, a concept known as symbolic interactionism (SI; Stryker, 1980). The core principle of SI is that symbols enable humans to maintain a shared sense of meaning, while also offering the ability to challenge everyday perspectives and bring social change (Snow, 2001). Another observation which is evident in the predominance and publicity around these symbolic gestures is that they have frequently focused on the issue of race in America (Edwards, 2016a). Displays by Colin Kaepernick (Reilly, 2016) and those who support him, college athlete activism at the University of Missouri (Yan et al., 2018), and increased willingness of high profile athletes to venture into the political sphere (Marston, 2017), has been described by Harry Edwards and others as an "awakening" (Wiggins, 2014). Agyemang et al. (2010) advocated for more focus on such social issues in sport due to the importance of gaining understanding from multiple perspectives. Thus, in a time of heightened scrutiny of college athletics at all levels—from the behavior of scholarship athletes away from the field, to the prospect of compensating college athletes for commercial

use of their image (Dwyer, 2019)—activist statements by college athletes are worthy of examination.

Based upon the power of symbols and the impact of race on our political discourse within sport, the purpose of this study was to analyze the role of symbolism in the COU. The demonstration exhibited the impact nonverbal symbols can have in communicating athletes' desire to bring attention to social issues while also highlighting the limits of college athlete activism within the current construct of intercollegiate athletics. Analyzing the COU through the lenses of symbolic interactionism and critical race theory (CRT), as well as its potential impact on the community's view of the current political discourse, can demonstrate how college athletics' popularity will inevitably result in it being situated in the middle of topical societal discussions.

The following sections provide review of the impact of such symbols, examined through the lens of SI, with CRT guiding the exploration of this topic. A review of previous athlete activism begins the review of these topics, serving as context for the study.

Review of Literature

The outsized profile that athletes possess in the sport-obsessed United States has afforded them a unique platform from which to speak on societal issues. This has led to an array of scholarship about activism within the field of sport, in professional, collegiate, and amateur athletics. This study utilizes two critical theories—symbolic interactionism and critical race theory—as a framework to analyze the COU. Like so many gestures of athlete activism, the issue of race is a critical intersection.

Athlete Activism

Although athletes have long voiced concerns over religious and gender issues, armed conflicts, and facility conditions to name a few, social concerns frequently center on issues of race (Wulf, 2019). Cooper et al. (2019) suggest that diversity and complexity of race-based sport activism can be organized into examples of symbolic activism, scholarly activism, grassroots activism, sport-based activism, and economic activism. Particularly relevant to this study, "symbolic activism refers to deliberate actions exhibited by athletes designed to draw attention to social injustices and inspire positive change in political, educational, economic, and social sectors" (Cooper et al., 2019, p. 166). Protests are the most popular form of public demonstrative activist actions (PDAAs), as they are often highly visible and disruptive, such as the Smith and Carlos medal stand PDAA at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics.

The PDAA by Smith and Carlos, perhaps one of the most powerful and enduring displays against racial injustice in all of sport, was an outgrowth of the Olympic Project for Human Rights led by Edwards at San Jose State University (SJSU). Although the most visible, the Smith/Carlos PDAA was one of many from the mid-1960s-1970s, where athletes of color demanded dignity and respect (Edwards 2016a; Cooper et al., 2019). At SJSU in 1967, Edwards (2016b) organized a movement to

protest discriminatory policies throughout the institution, which included the eventual cancellation of a football game. In 1969, 14 Black athletes on the University of Wyoming football team (who would become known as the Black 14) were dismissed from the team after requesting to wear black armbands in a game against Brigham Young University to bring attention to the Mormon Church's prohibition against Black members joining the priesthood (Yang, 2020a). Then in 1970, a group of nine Black players at Syracuse University (who would erroneously become known as the Syracuse 8) were ostracized after sitting out spring practice in an attempt to end racial oppression within the football program (Yang, 2020b). These are but a few examples of the efforts made by college athletes that reflect the socio-political context of the era (Cooper et al., 2019), as similar PDAAs have made a resurgence since the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2013.

Despite athlete activism's general goal of shedding light on social injustices, the potential for pushback from entrenched power sources has been immense. Kaepernick experienced this after his silent protest of systemic White racism in America in 2016 (Reilly, 2016). Kaepernick's actions inspired support and imitators across the U.S. (BBC News, 2017), but also vociferous opposition (Breech, 2016; Travis, 2016), something also faced by any college athlete who stepped into this arena (Frederick et al., 2017). Two years later, this issue was used by President Donald Trump to inflame his supporters (Gardner, 2018). This speaks to the risks that any athlete must factor into his or her decision to make a public stand and suggests the unique success of the COU to make public commentary on a controversial issue without becoming, to pardon the pun, a political football.

Social activism in the 21st century has also been strengthened by the collaboration among athletes either on the same team or within the same sport. The success of the University of Missouri football team's PDAA was partly due to the unification of the team in support of the boycott (Frederick et al., 2017). Missouri football players joined escalating student protests over what they saw as a divisive racial climate on the school's campus, making ample use of connected social media technologies to spread and amplify their message (Yan et al., 2018). Ultimately, the threat of the football team boycotting a game against Brigham Young University helped bring about significant change at the university, including the resignation of the University of Missouri president and chancellor (Yan et al., 2018). Although the case of the Missouri football team received attention from researchers such as Frederick et al. (2017) and Yan et al. (2018), both investigations focused on the case from a social media perspective. While Agyemang et al. (2010) uncovered perceptions of Black college athletes regarding race and athlete activism, they called for more scholarship on athlete activism and the experiences of Black athletes as the most important stakeholder group within college sport.

The nature of athlete activism, specifically within college athletics, is unique and often limited. Riddled with layers of rules, policies, and limitations, in conjunction with structures of power beholden to limit the voices of college athletes, symbols may serve as an outlet for them to voice their concerns about the society in which they also exist. Various backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives also

add nuance to potential college athlete activism as 49 percent of the football college athletes in NCAA Division I are Black, compared to 15 percent of head coaches and 37 percent of assistant coaches (NCAA Demographics Database, 2019), making the COU a unique and important symbol to examine.

Theoretical Framework

Study of the impactful acts of athlete activism throughout the past century can be guided through the application of critical theory, which can frame the analysis. Significant context was added to the analysis of the COU by examining the gesture through two such thrusts of critical scholarship—symbolic interactionism and critical race theory.

Symbolic Interactionism

SI is a social-psychological theory that focuses on human interaction. Humans are shown to interact with each other using symbols that maintain a shared sense of meaning among groups of people (Kloberdanz, 1988). Symbols include actions, languages, and objects such as books, pictures, and food (Morasso & Zittoun, 2014; Solomon, 1983). Such symbols are used to motivate and organize behavior (Stryker, 1980).

Blumer (1969) presented three core beliefs comprising SI. First, human beings' actions are guided by the meaning they have of such actions and objects. Using an example from the Southeastern Conference (SEC), a fan of the University of Alabama wearing a houndstooth hat in honor of former coach Paul "Bear" Bryant and his chosen headwear, would represent the first core belief. Second, the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with others. That could be reflected through cries of "War Eagle" by fans of Alabama's storied rival, Auburn University. Third, these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he or she encounters. The University of Tennessee's "checkerboard" end zone pattern at Neyland Stadium being used in other team paraphernalia (e.g., bib overalls) would be an example of this modification and interpretation. Society is therefore comprised of individuals' joint actions, which is performing and interpreting actions in the context of relations with others (Blumer, 1969). In order to create meaning out of specific symbols, individuals require a system of interpretation or symbolic communication readily interpreted by all participants in the phenomenon (Denzin, 2016; Mead, 1934).

Snow (2001) provided an extension of Blumer's conceptualization of SI, offering four principles—interactive determination, symbolization, emergence, and human agency. Specifically, the principle of emergence focuses on the impermanence of many symbols with the belief that "new, novel, or revitalized social entities … arise that constitute departures from, challenges to, and clarifications or transformations of everyday routines, practices, or perspectives" (Snow, 2001, p. 372). Hence, while some symbols and their interpretations and meanings become habit, others are much more reflexive. With the evolving nature of society, social entities utilize

symbolic actions that maintain a sense of meaning, often with the goal of bringing social change. Performance of symbols fluctuates based upon the cognitive and emotional states of the actors and those impacted by the performance of the symbols. An example of a symbol that does not become habit is college football fans chanting and wearing shirts supporting the firing of their school's head coach, only for such action to halt following the school's sudden winning streak. Thus, the performance of many symbolic actions is impacted by the changing thoughts and beliefs of human beings. Examples of emergent SI include protests during the U.S. Civil Rights Movement (McAdam, 1983) such as Carlos and Smith's Black Power Salute at the 1968 Mexico City Olympic Games (Carlos & Zirin, 2011). Snow (2001) noted that the outcomes of these symbolic actions may simply be changes in how groups of people view themselves and are viewed by others. Therefore, the college athletes and other stakeholders analyzed in the current study utilized a novel form of symbolic behavior. In this study, we aimed to examine such behavior in relation to the change the symbol aimed to make.

Critical Race Theory

To gain a richer understanding of how symbols play a role in athlete activism, researchers should also consider the systems in which the athletes and symbols exist. College athletics is a system built on the exploitation of "amateur" athletes, where power balance skews toward White athletic administrators reaping the financial benefits associated with revenue-generating sports, whose rosters are made of predominantly Black athletes (McCormick & McCormick, 2012). Athletics, specifically high school and college athletics, is interpreted by Black males as a viable path for reaching their career aspirations, yet Black males, who make up a majority of rosters for revenue-generating sports, have lower graduation rates compared to their White counterparts (Donnor, 2005). This context is important to understand when evaluating the role of symbols in athlete activism, especially at the intercollegiate level. For example, despite the successful outcome of the University of Missouri PDAA, their efforts were criticized, condemned, and their concerns were often downplayed (Frederick et al., 2017). Many PDAA's are spurred by racial injustices, specifically. Therefore, it is appropriate to consider the context of race with symbols and athlete activism through the lens of CRT.

CRT emerged in the legal and education fields as an approach to challenging the status quo, thus allowing a broader perspective on how we consider race in the world (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Hylton, 2010). CRT proposes that "modern racism and racial inequity is systematic because it privileges and normalizes 'cultural messages and institutional policies and practices' that function to advantage whites—both directly and indirectly" (Donnor, 2005, p. 52). The CRT framework is not meant to be abstract (Taylor, 1998); instead, it should be used as a guide to understand the true nature of racism in the U.S. (DeLorme & Singer, 2010). Ultimately, CRT is a "series of critiques seeking to positively disrupt and transform racialized power relations regardless of the actors involved" (Hylton, 2010, p. 338). Through its major tenets—counter-storytelling, the permanence of racism, race as a social construct, whiteness

as a property, interest convergence, and the critique of liberalism (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2016)—CRT challenges the existence of neutral race practices and promotes the value of "the Black voice" (Hylton, 2010, p. 337). Most relevant for the current study are interest convergence, counter-storytelling, and critique of liberalism. Each of these tenets has been applied in extant literature (e.g., Agyemang et al., 2010; Frederick et al., 2019; Frederick et al., 2017) to explore situations surrounding previous events of athlete activism, with the goal of uncovering underlying motives, constraints, and other characteristics—such as symbols—present within these displays, much like the current case.

Interest convergence posits that decisions are made by White people (i.e., those in power), not wholly for the benefit of people of color, but out of self-interest (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Hylton, 2010). Derrick Bell, the founding father of CRT (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Donnor, 2005), posited that the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision came to pass as a form of national interest for the dominant race, rather than at the interest of serving Black people in America (Bell, 1995; Dudziak, 1988). The national interest was geopolitical in nature. The U.S.'s commitment to democracy was in question due to its participation in segregation and discrimination of its own people, inextricably connecting the *Brown* decision to the Cold War (Dudziak, 2004). The integration of schools after the *Brown* (1954) decision lends itself to interest convergence, suggesting that "African Americans' interest in achieving racial equality advanced only when it converged with European Americans' interest, but not when it conflicted with their superior societal standing" (McCormick & McCormick, 2012, p. 41-42). Dudziak (2004) later empirically confirmed that the U.S. Justice Department intervened in *Brown* strictly because of national interests. Donnor (2005) applied interest convergence to better understand the complex educational experience of Black NCAA football players, ultimately recommending the application of CRT to improve the educational experience and outcomes for these athletes.

Counter-storytelling provides a voice to the marginalized, thus challenging the status quo narratives provided by the majority, thus casting doubt over narratives created by the majority (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; DeLorme & Singer, 2010). The Players Tribune, an online media platform committed to sharing stories from the perspective of the athlete or coach, dedicated a section of its site—Silence in not an option—to sharing personal stories of racism and marginalization. For example, National Basketball Association (NBA) Milwaukee Bucks player Sterling Brown shared his personal story of police brutality after he was tased and physically attacked by Milwaukee police officers in 2018 (Brown, 2020). In another Players Tribune article, NBA Hall of Famer Bill Russell shared a memory of counter-storytelling from 1969, when he interviewed former restaurateur-turned-Georgia Governor Lester Maddox, who only entered politics after closing his restaurant because he refused to serve Black patrons. In Russell's view, "having him on my show exposed him for the fool he was'' (Russell, 2020, para. 3). Agyemang et al. (2010) found that counter-storytelling was valuable for Black athletes in recognizing the historical feats of Black athlete activism. Additionally, Frederick et al. (2019) found a presence

of muting storytelling of Black athletes in their examination of comments posted on ESPN's Facebook page after NBA athletes spoke about racial issues at the ESPYs.

Lastly, critique of liberalism "centers on how critical race scholars are critical of and challenge the concepts of objectivity, meritocracy, color blindness, race neutrality, equal opportunity, and incremental change" (Turick et al., 2020, p. 3). In these situations, "rights are almost always cut back when they conflict with the interests of the powerful" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 29). Liberalism also comes into play when the marginalized are motivated to make a change but are beholden to those in power who look to embrace change, but at a slow and incremental pace (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004), exposing the limitations of laws and organizational policy. For example, athletes at the University of North Carolina (UNC) led an unsuccessful suit against the university and the NCAA after the academic fraud scandal involving "paper" classes hosted in the Department of African and Afro-American Studies was uncovered (Gronberg, 2017). This case highlights the limitations of both the NCAA's principle of amateurism, as well as educational policies—or at least practices—that ensure athlete eligibility rather than rigorous academic standards. In another example related to symbolism, Turick and colleagues (2020) investigated the names of athletic facilities on NCAA Division I Football Bowl Subdivision campuses, identifying 18 venues named after individuals who participated in racist activities or held racist views. Singer et al. (2017) suggest that, based on the critique of liberalism tenet, "the notions of color blindness, meritocracy, and objectivity often obscure the unearned and unjust power, privileges, and advantages many Whites have gained and maintained throughout history" (p. 20). Since individuals such as Phog Allen (University of Kansas), Guy Mackey (Purdue University), Robert Neyland (University of Tennessee), and Adolph Ruff (University of Kentucky) have long been endeared and enshrined at their respective institutions, it may help to explain a lack of critical examination for those honored with venue names despite their questionable racist pasts (Turick et al., 2020).

CRT provided the framework necessary to guide the examination of the symbolic interactionism of the COU. Systemic restrictions created and instilled by the NCAA and its member institutions have allowed for the perpetration of athletes for financial gains while limiting athletes' economic and social power (McCormick & McCormick, 2012). For example, Donnor (2005) posited that "Black males who participate in major football programs either earning a college degree or developing a strong academic skill-set in technology, literacy, science, numeracy, history and the humanities is unlikely" (p. 60). The COU was created, in part, as a reaction to the shooting death of Keith Lamont Scott, a Black man killed by a Charlotte police officer (Yan et al., 2016). The racial focus of this symbol, in conjunction with the racial makeup of the ODU football program during the 2016 season—more than 75 percent of the team were Black while 12 of 17 members of the coaching staff were White—made the COU an interesting and nuanced case to examine symbolic interactionism while also acknowledging and observing the case from a critical race theory perspective.

The Circle of Unity Case Study

Members of the ODU football team displayed the COU gesture prior to its September 2016 game against UTSA. Inspired by actions by Kaepernick, James, and other professional athletes, ODU players sought to perform a symbolic response to the systemic oppression and racial injustice across the U.S. While members of the team wore "Black Lives Matter" (BLM) shirts on the field before warmups prior to first deploying the COU, Wilder encouraged the team to create a gesture that would express a desire for unity, leading to the creation of the COU (Minium, 2016a). As a result, the team generated national media attention with the unique nature of the symbolic COU, which Wilder suggested was less controversial than national anthem PDAAs at that time (Johnson, 2016).

Coverage throughout the week following the game included a nationally televised interview on ESPN and online coverage by outlets such as USA Today (Associated Press, 2016). Wilder explained how he hoped the COU could "do something to make a difference … instead of adding to the noise" (Minium, 2016b, para. 3). Wilder used the national pulpit to announce the creation of Children 4 Humanity, a nonprofit where ODU football players would hold outreach events with local service clubs to connect with impressionable young boys and girls, a plan developed by Wilder and team captains.

Noting that University of North Carolina at Charlotte (Charlotte) head coach Brad Lambert and his team were planning to join the COU demonstration for the next week's game, Wilder used his national platform to challenge college football coaches across the U.S. to further empower players to find their voice. Wilder stressed that it was important for college football coaches to take seriously the concerns of their players (Minium, 2016b).

Ultimately, the gesture generated significant positive feedback from followers of the program, along with vocal criticism from a small segment of the fanbase, more than a dozen of whom called ODU Athletics to complain. The COU also coincided with the best team in the history of this incarnation of the program. (ODU did not field a football team from 1941 through 2008, when the program was restarted [ODU Athletics, 2016]). Throughout the remainder of the 2016 season, including before the Popeyes Bahamas Bowl, the gesture was repeated by the Monarchs. ODU extended an invitation to every opposing team that season to join the Monarchs for the COU; all but two opponents participated in the display immediately before kickoff during the 2016 season.

The purpose of this case study was to analyze the role of symbolism in the COU. Through analysis of media coverage and interviews, grounded by previous research of SI and CRT, four research questions were posed:

RQ1—What role do symbols play in race-based college athlete activism?
RQ2—To what degree are symbols and symbolic gestures considered a form of athlete activism?

RQ3—How are college athletes supported or constrained when attempting to make their voices heard; and
RQ4—How is symbolic activism perceived by relevant stakeholders?

Method

Research Design

The current study employed a case study research design. Case studies are a widely deployed research methodology, particularly appropriate for seeking deeper understanding of bounded phenomena (Yin, 2014). In the case of the COU, data were collected shortly after the 2016 football season, the only season where the COU was deployed. Stake (2000) suggests a case study features circumstances of special interest, allowing researchers to look for detail of interaction with its context. Well-constructed case studies are both holistic and context-sensitive, and can include many different communities—from groups, to organizations, to cultures and regions (Patton, 2002). A case study analysis is particularly appropriate for this project because the data collected comprises the best opportunity to take the reader inside the COU experience, hearing multiple perspectives to achieve a layered understanding (Patton, 2002).

Participants

This project included data analysis from two sources—media coverage of the COU throughout the 2016 season and interviews with ODU football stakeholders. In an effort to incorporate a broad array of perspectives, the majority of data analyzed for this study were in interviews with various stakeholders. Researchers conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews with five individuals, who each had a different perspective of the COU. Table 1 provides each stakeholder's name, the number of years they have been connected to Old Dominion football and their stakeholder role, their hometown, and their race.

Data Collection

The five study participants were interviewed independently, with each interviewee asked unique Institutional Review Board-approved, semi-structured questions tailored to their role in relation to the COU. The question list for each of the five participants in the study is listed in Appendix A. As a semi-structured interview, each question line was added to as respondents' answers merited topic-specific follow-up questions. Since each participant represented a far different stakeholder role for ODU football, their views on the Circle of Unity were likely to reflect that perspective. Therefore, the IRB-approved question lines that were created featured unique prompts, such as an opportunity for football player Rashaad Coward to reflect on his experience as a young black man in America with a platform to participate in a symbolic gesture, or the utter surprise senior athletics officials felt when they first heard about the Circle of Unity plans one hour before they were deployed.

Table 1

Participant Descriptions

Participant	Stakeholder Description	Years in Stakeholder Role	Hometown	Race
Rashaad Coward	ODU Defensive Lineman; 2016 Team Captain	2013-2016	Brooklyn, NY	Black
Larry Eakin	ODU Football Season Ticket-Holder	2009-present	Virginia Beach, VA	White
Harry Minium	*The Virginian-Pilot*, ODU Football Beat Writer	2012-2018	Norfolk, VA	White
Bruce Stewart	ODU Senior Associate Athletic Director	2007-present	Columbus, OH	Black
Bobby Wilder	ODU Head Football Coach	2009-2019	Madison, ME	White

Thematically, each of the five participants were offered an opportunity to address what the Circle of Unity meant to them as a symbol or gesture, the one similar thread which ran through each of the five interviews. This was done mindfully. CRT emphasizes examining how we consider race in the world with a broader perspective (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Hylton, 2010), so the responses to the gesture and its aftermath were predicted to highlight how each participant approached the public display from his own, internal positioning.

Interviews ranged from 12 to 41 minutes; recordings of the interviews were transcribed shortly after each interview occurred. These five participants represented key stakeholder groups who formed and shaped the COU and offered opinions about it—player, coach, administrator, fan, and journalist. The case study was bounded by the interviewees to allow in-depth analysis of the views of key constituent groups. However, the interviewees recognized how their views of the COU were impacted by the views of others in the community, stating this during their interviews. Because of the small number of study participants, and the extreme likelihood that readers would be able to figure out the source of a de-identified quote, participants consented to their names being used in the study. In an effort to establish trustworthiness through confirmability and authenticity, interview subjects were offered an opportunity to member-check their responses to the semi-structured questions to confirm that the transcripts accurately reflected their interview. None of the interview participants raised questions or concerns about the transcript of their responses.

Researcher Positionality

In an effort to reflect the diversity of interview subjects and to ensure diverse perspectives for the data analysis, the research team was composed of individuals who hold both insider and outsider research characteristics. From an organizational perspective, the research team had myriad professional experience in college athlet-

ics, coaching, journalism, public relations, and student-athlete development, which helped each researcher establish themselves as an insider researcher in his or her own unique way. From a social perspective, the research team consisted of three White males and one mixed race female, all hailing from distinctly different regions throughout North America, and varying socioeconomic backgrounds, which provided important considerations of "otherness" when analyzing the case on issues such as privilege and social power (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Data Analysis

To ascertain meaning from the interviews, the researchers relied on a directed content analysis. When there is prior information known about a phenomenon, which would aid in further describing data that are gathered for a study, a directed content analysis is well-suited (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The goal of a directed approach is to extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory—in this case, the COU as a form of athlete activism in the context of SI and CRT. Following the recommendation from Creswell (2006), the researchers used the chronological sequence of events to guide data analysis, beginning with the planning and emergence of the COU, followed by its initial impact, continuing evolution, and the eventual aftermath of the COU.

Following the interviews, three of the study authors predicted themes that would emerge from the data, based on their understanding of the COU, SI, and athlete activism. After a consensus forecast was produced, the researchers conducted independent, directed content analysis of the interview transcripts, independently identifying dominant content and themes (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999). Through prior understanding of both the COU and athlete activism, the researchers were able to link the modern-day interviews with the existing theoretical framework (Hays & Singh, 2012). This acted as a form of internal reliability for the data, as the researchers could compare what was found in the data with the consensus-expected themes. In addition to member checking, to further maximize trustworthiness through credibility and confirmability, triangulation of both investigators and theoretical perspectives were utilized in an effort to better conceptualize and explain the phenomenon (Hays & Singh, 2012). Additionally, a fourth author examined the analysis upon completion through the CRT framework to further triangulate the data and the perspectives of the investigators.

Results

Through independent analysis of COU media coverage, as well as an understanding of athlete activism and SI, the researchers generated a list of expected themes to emerge from the interview data. Since the reviewers were all familiar with the Circle of Unity timeline and interview transcripts, there was little disagreement among researchers in the generation of dominant themes. They included: (a) explanation and rationale for the decision to make the gesture; (b) an explanation of the decision-making around the specific symbol; (c) the impression of the COU from multiple perspectives; (d) support for the gesture, as well as some pushback from the

"stick to sports" crowd; (e) feedback about its galvanizing effect on the team and its fans; and (f) fear that the gesture, however meaningful, would fade in impact if not continued in subsequent seasons.

Next, three authors independently coded the interview transcripts of Wilder, Coward, Stewart, Minium, and Eakin, assembling findings which lined up under the predicted themes, as well as any unexpected findings. Four themes emerged from the data. Many were predicted by the advance themes generated through directed content analysis. Some, however, were not. The following four sections explain each of the consensus themes found in the data, amplified by attributed quotes from the five interviews.

Surprise

According to Wilder and Coward, the defensive lineman and team captain, discussion of national events was common in the ODU team locker room. However, plans for the COU were formulated by Wilder and his captains, and then revealed to athletic administration only one hour prior to kickoff with UTSA. "Blindsided would probably be a word that would be associated with this, because it came up so quickly," said Stewart, the University's senior associate athletic director. "I think the fans didn't know what was going on. They were like, 'Okay, that's cool,' and they went back to their beer or whatever," said Minium, the *Virginian-Pilot* beat reporter, who also was unaware of the COU beforehand. Eakin, the season ticket holder, confirmed this: "I'm not sure I had a clue what was going on that first time," he said. "(Coach Wilder) had been very positive early on (with the program), having the players go down to the student end, thanking them for coming. I thought about it in that context." The element of surprise was not planned. Wilder said the gesture was arrived at following negotiations between the coach and his captains, who had expressed an interest in making a public gesture or statement to bring awareness to racial injustice across the U.S. This need to "negotiate" the PDAA indicated a level of both interest convergence and critique of liberalism, central tenets of CRT.

Do "Something"

In the run-up to the game in which the demonstration was unveiled, there had been emotional discussions between players and coaches. Issues such as police-involved shootings and a polarizing presidential election season convinced the players they had to do "something" to express their feelings. "It was not just what happened in Charlotte, in Tulsa, in Dallas, or Colin Kaepernick taking a knee. It was a culmination of everything going on in our world," Wilder said. The coach stressed that he did not want an action that would "add to the noise" of a turbulent time. In other words, Wilder wanted to avoid any action that might have been viewed as controversial, while still allowing athletes to engage in activism and express their concerns. The idea for the COU crystalized when a fellow co-captain recalled episodes from his own upbringing, Coward said. "Zach Pascal came up with the idea of—when him and his sister were fighting when they were younger, his parents made them hold hands. You can't be mad at somebody when you're holding hands with them."

The desire to respond to the ongoing social issues did not just come from inside the team, but also externally. Coward noted that NFL players reached out to Wilder via social media asking for him and the team to "do something" to help bring the Charlotte community back together following the September 2016 police shooting of Keith Lamont Scott, which led to protests and unrest (Domonoske, 2016). The desire for public demonstration aligns with the CRT tenet counter-storytelling, as Black athletes both within and outside the ODU program sought to express their feelings on a public stage.

Going "Public"

For participants and observers, the discussion in the days following the first COU display was pivotal. Plans were made to continue the following week, this time inviting that week's opponent, University of North Carolina-Charlotte 49ers, to participate. Wilder did numerous local media interviews, as well as a nationally televised interview on ESPN. The team captains who first approached Wilder with their concerns sat down with the *Pilot's* Minium and told their personal stories (Minium, 2016c). The reporter said it was a significant education for him, one which contradicted dominant media narratives about violent citizen-police interactions. "I asked them all about their interactions with police. Some were bad, some were good, but their perception of life is so much different than people who grew up in the suburbs," Minium said. As media coverage accelerated, Wilder stressed the name of the gesture repeatedly—the Circle of Unity. "We could have called it the Circle of Hope, the Circle of Happiness. We could have called it the Circle of Team. We chose 'unity' because the entire goal of what our symbol was to unify our country and unify our world." Wilder said that was a key component of getting the public to accept what was in essence a statement about how society faces tough issues.

Because it was a public statement, in an arena where other public statements quickly became divisive, the COU required a deftness of execution. Therefore, a consistent vein of public relations considerations ran through the comments of both the participants and observers, something that was not anticipated by researchers in their directed content analysis. Notably, Wilder used the exact same phraseology to describe the motivation for the COU in interviews with the *Pilot*, ESPN, and for this study. There was a prediction of backlash from some fans of the program. Wilder stressed to his players that they were not to argue with those who criticized them in public, or on social media. The coach also telephoned every fan who contacted the University's athletic fundraising division with complaints about the COU. "I stressed that everyone that attacked, we were not going to attack them back. We were going to invite them into the Circle," Wilder said, thus epitomizing the essence of the COU while also mitigating any concerns associated with the act. From a public relations standpoint, Wilder's approach appeared effective. Eakin, who witnessed the first COU gesture, was supportive of the cause. He was also appreciative that it was done subtly. "I never heard a negative statement, and believe me, I hear plenty of negative statements about him coaching … it's not like I live in a choir of angels. But nope, never heard anyone say a thing except positive stuff about it," he said.

The Evolution of a Symbol

The largely positive response was exceeded by the internal positivity created by the gesture, according to the data. A win streak followed the first COU display; in fact, ODU won nine of its last 10 games of the 2016 season. Coward, the defensive lineman, said the COU helped form a team-wide bond. "When I first got here, cliques, there was a whole bunch of cliques on the team … after that situation, we were like a team," he said. Wilder credited the COU for giving the team a higher purpose that season. "If you go back and look at different teams, you ask: 'What changed? What brought this microcosm of society all together?' I believe it was the Circle of Unity—and the improved play by quarterback David Washington—that was the defining moment for us," he said. "It was a very powerful symbol, and I'm surprised more teams didn't emulate it," said Minium, the journalist.

The interviews for this case study were done a few months after the 2016 season ended, but before preseason fall practice for the following season. It was unclear whether the COU would continue the following season. Observers doubted whether the energy generated from the 2016 season could continue but hoped for some residual benefit to result from the 2016 season. "I really have my doubts (it would continue). I've seen a lot of ideas come and go and they don't seem to sustain over periods of time," Eakin said. Minium recommended continuing the gesture, if only because of how it changed the chemistry in a locker room he was in every day during football season as a beat reporter. "If it doesn't continue next year, I think the lasting impression will be limited … it was, I hate to use this word because I'm a journalist and all that, it was a very special team to cover," he said.

Internal stakeholders suggested the potential for the COU to have lasting goodwill, even if it was a one-season gesture. Senior Associate AD Stewart said a department-wide growth in social consciousness existed that fall among the University's student-athletes, "Because it became bigger than just football. I think they had some influence over some of our other sports programs, and you saw a spike in community service endeavors that were being done throughout our department." Coward said the positive nature of the demonstration meant that it was something other athletes wanted to mirror in their own actions. "The week that we played Charlotte, NFL guys started hitting up Coach Wilder on Twitter, and were telling us they wanted to do something to bring his community back together … And by us doing that with the Charlotte team, it brought our community together, and brought positivity in a dark time." This fact perhaps best defines the moment-in-time nature of the COU. External stakeholders also agreed with the general impact and message of the symbol: "You know, it's pretty hard to be against unity," Eakin said.

Only lasting a season, the COU can be viewed as both having a powerful impact during its one season while also perhaps failing to have a long-term impact. The lasting effect that could have resulted will never be known; however, the data exhibit the impact it had on numerous stakeholders both inside and outside the ODU program. Such impact on the ODU football players and others within the ODU community will never be able to be truly understood. Thus, while only sustained for a season, the impact of the COU should not be discounted.

Discussion

For a few months of the 2016 season, players and coaches of the ODU football team made a public statement expressing their dismay with social issues in America. High-profile athletes including Colin Kaepernick and LeBron James have generated much national attention for their social activism, receiving both praise and scorn for their symbolic actions. Motivated by many of the same conflicted emotions about the modern-day United States, ODU's Circle of Unity gesture was met with muted approval within the local football community and endured little of the backlash that other, contemporary athletic activists received. It also, however, was constrained by actions within the university's embedded power structure. The current study examined the COU through the two theoretical lenses of symbolic interactionism and critical race theory. The power of symbols and the embedded, racialized power dynamics within collegiate athletics allowed for a robust examination of the COU, allowing its meaning and impact to be framed along the spectrum of athlete activism, suggesting lessons that can be learned from the exercise for student-athletes, coaches, and administrators.

Addressing RQ1, examining what role symbols play in college athlete activism, we discovered the creation, execution, and impact of the COU reflected the tenets of SI in a few ways. The symbol itself was developed with the goal of creating unity among all stakeholders involved with the ODU football team including players, coaches, and fans (Snow, 2001). The COU was also shown to draw upon the inclusive nature of circles, and guide people's actions as a result (Denzin, 2016; Mead, 1934). The action of standing in a circle and holding hands as a symbol showed a sense of unity across the team and was interpreted as such (Blumer, 1969; Cooper et al., 2019). The symbol itself was created not only as a form of expression, but with the intention to create a positive behavioral change (Snow, 2001; Stryker, 1980), instead of other potential symbols that could have been viewed negatively by some. Compared to the PDAA's of the 1960's and 70's (Cooper et al., 2019), the COU aimed to reflect the socio-political context of the present.

From the perspective of CRT, the symbol (holding hands in a circle during warmups) could be perceived as muted and carefully crafted to ensure all stakeholders were appeased (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). The symbol represents an example of counter-storytelling, where the athletes are attempting to provide a voice for themselves and those who are marginalized but are restricted in how this is done (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). The perception and response to the symbol by external stakeholders such as the season ticket holder Eakin, highlighted the neutrality of the symbol, in comparison to the BLM t-shirts, which further emphasized a critique of liberalism (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). The COU as a symbol was acceptable, but BLM shirts would have been a step too far, as Wilder and Eakin alluded to. The symbolic "choice" of the COU over BLM shirts (or even kneeling during the national anthem) represents only incremental change, which could itself be interpreted as the perpetuation of systemic racism within college sport. Therefore, this PDAA highlighted the

need to examine examples of athlete activism through a CRT lens (Agyemang et al., 2010; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; DeLorme & Singer, 2010; Frederick et al., 2019; Frederick et al., 2017; Hylton, 2010).

In addressing RQ2, the degree to which the symbols and symbolic gestures could be considered a form of athlete activism, the college athletes in this study simply desired to respond to the ongoing social tensions in a positive way, shifting the way they view themselves and the way fans viewed them, exhibiting their ability to challenge perspectives and bring social change (Snow, 2001). There was very little direct discussion of the COU as a PDAA itself. With Wilder telling his players that it was their responsibility to own any negative feedback received from the gesture, both players and coaches helped foster the national exposure and positive feedback, ensuring the symbol was interpreted accurately (Blumer, 1969; Denzin, 2016; Mead, 1934). But Wilder's action also exemplified tenets of CRT, where the players were limited in their expression, where the symbol required approval of the coach. While the initial intention of the symbol was in response to the killing of an unarmed Black male, the coach guided players to respond as a unit, encouraging them not to "add to the noise." Thus, the coach's actions speak to the critique of liberalism, both in neutralizing the player's actions and embracing change but slowly (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).

Additionally, the creation of the non-profit, Children 4 Humanity, in response to the COU, could be considered a form of athlete activism (Cooper et al., 2019). This grassroots activism was a micro-level example of community engagement and mentoring in which the team did more than "add to the noise." But while the intentions of the COU was to shed light on the killing of the unarmed Black man, among other racially charged issues occurring in the U.S., the team created a nonprofit organization that did not connect directly with the initial motivation to create the COU. This highlights another example of a critique of liberalism, where the marginalized are motivated to make a change, but at a slow and manageable pace (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).

While not an explicit goal of the ODU players, a positive, unexpected outcome of the COU was the increase in college athlete community engagement. The football team's goal to bring attention to social injustices spurred a sense of community and giving back among their peers, thus motivating others to action (Cooper et al., 2019; Snow, 2001; Stryker, 1980). Further, while many PDAAs desire to serve as a disruption and challenge structures and systems, the COU was employed due to the players' desire to simply do something to express their feelings. Thus, there was no stated desire to achieve systemic change or serve as a disruption to any system as the focus was on the ability for the circle to unite members of the team and community.

Concerning the final two research questions investigating the support/constraints faced by the athletes and the response by stakeholders to the COU, activist displays manifest differently at the collegiate level due to the embedded power structures which exist; athletes are beholden to the institution for their financial wellbeing. Consequences and backlash typically occur in response to athlete activism at all levels but may be harsher at the intercollegiate level. For example, the University

of Missouri athletes were supported by head coach Gary Pinkel in their demonstration, while Grambling State University athletes' boycott came without support from coaches or administration. The context of each protest is significant—where Missouri athletes joined an ongoing university-wide protest addressing racial injustices—while Grambling State athletes were protesting due to the poor conditions of facilities and athletic support. Thus, it was crucial that the symbol create a shared sense of meaning across groups (Kloberdanz, 1988). ODU players' demonstration aligned closely with Missouri's in that they received support from Wilder, who met with team captains to determine a symbolic response that would create a shared sense of meaning (Kloberdanz, 1988), but was also appropriate for the setting (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Further, as the season progressed, and the team performed well, the symbol was seen as a galvanizing tool for players which may have helped them shift their self-perception (Snow, 2001). Thus, seemingly, the players' actions were encouraged.

These actions also came at the expense of other potential actions. For example, while administration was unaware of the symbolic action prior to its first display, Wilder's decision to encourage players to perform the COU as opposed to wearing the BLM shirts or engage in other acts suggests that the views of administration and other stakeholders were considered, and potentially overrode the views of the players, highlighting interest convergence (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; DeLorme & Singer, 2010). Season ticket holder Eakin's suggestion that the response may have been different had the players worn BLM t-shirts while forming the COU acknowledged that the symbol would have been interpreted differently, and thus supported the COU, which asks—what is significantly different about a BLM shirt and the COU? That sentiment, along with Wilder's steering of the COU, highlights the importance of applying the CRT framework to this study, as it exemplifies the systemic racial inequality layered into something as innocuous as a Circle of Unity symbol (Donnor, 2005). While the reaction to players' wearing BLM shirts while performing the COU will never be known given the polarized nature of race-based discourse in the U.S., it likely prevented negative response from entrenched, White power structures (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Hylton, 2010). Additionally, Wilder also represented the team as a spokesperson of sorts, supporting the team through promotion of the symbol and open communication with the media, fans, and other stakeholders; another example of how power structures may be utilized to manage the narrative (Hylton, 2010). Thus, the symbol can and should be viewed with a critical lens as players sought to express themselves in reaction to the social and racial injustices occurring in the U.S., and those in power sought to support them but in a more muted capacity (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Hylton, 2010).

The act produced mostly positive responses, which helped athletes solicit support from various stakeholders and unify the team (Stryker, 1980). The team's improved performance, ultimately leading to the program's most successful season in history, was partly attributed to the impact of the COU, exhibiting the positive impact of symbols (Snow, 2001). Furthermore, the athletic program's community service

efforts also appeared to increase, yielding a positive social impact from the COU (Cooper et al., 2019; Stryker, 1980). Another positive response came in the form of national publicity, which allowed the team to further expand the reach and impact of the symbol (Denzin, 2016; Mead, 1934). Wilder's national interviews, including on ESPN's SportsCenter, provided positive publicity for the team, university, as well as the movement surrounding positive social change. The communication of the action throughout the country led to NFL players reaching out to express their desire to perform the COU, further promoting the movement toward positive change (Cooper et al., 2019; Stryker, 1980).

This represents a significant finding of the study—the importance of public relations in any effort to use an athletic arena for activist goals. An observer might suggest Wilder threaded the needle by supporting his players in their desire to make a statement about an issue that is important to them, while maintaining agency over his players as to not offend entrenched power structures with a confrontational view of race-based activism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Minium's interview with the captains of the team also shed light on the various perspectives and opinions of these college athletes. "…Their perception of life is so much different than people who grew up in the suburbs," as Minium stated in reference to his interview with the athletes, further emphasizes the difference between what is seen and what is understood across stakeholders (Snow, 2001), while also speaking to the importance of examining the current case from a CRT perspective toward understanding the true nature of racism in the U.S. (DeLorme & Singer, 2010; Donner, 2005). For example, critical race theorists could interpret Minium's statement as one grounded in racism—the discussion of life of "people who grew up in the suburbs" to that of Black college athletes whom are presumed to have grown up in the inner cities or in other circumstances. This comment, while minor in the context of the data, speaks volumes about the perspective of the stakeholders involved.

This also speaks to the nature of the status quo within the intercollegiate athletics system, where athletes who wish to support a specific cause, are limited in their capacity by the powers-that-be (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Hylton, 2010). Is there opportunity for athletes to don symbols that truly reflect who they are and what they represent, such as the BLM t-shirts? Or, will administration dilute their voices and symbols into something more palpable for mass audiences? This speaks to the importance of coaching and educating; to avoid stymieing activist hearts, but rather guide them, while also considering their own position within the conversation.

Conclusion

The actions of both the players and Wilder align with both SI and CRT. The Circle of Unity was encouraged by Wilder due to the circle being a unifying symbol that would not offend any relevant stakeholders. This suggests the "type" of symbol utilized in activism matters immensely. In contrast, the BLM t-shirts, while at their core exhibiting a positive message, had become divisive due to social interaction and

the meaning that White individuals began to assign them, which like many symbols, had evolved over time (Blumer, 1969; Snow, 2001). Wilder's actions also exhibit interest convergence, as he was attempting to satisfy two groups with differing power dynamics—predominantly White individuals in positions of power, and athletes of color who lack power (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). His representation of ODU players' desires, who themselves had little ability to publicly speak out about their interests and concerns, also provides basis for the use of CRT's counter-storytelling, to attempt to provide a voice for those without such voice (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Therefore, the symbol of expression used by ODU's players demonstrates how symbolic actions can be encouraged and provide meaning, albeit in a way that agrees with and benefits individuals in positions of power.

While comparison of athlete PDAAs was not a goal of this study, the unique nature of the COU presents potential explanation for the success and ongoing positive impact achieved as a result. The name "Circle of Unity" act of players and coaches holding hands (including, at times, members of opposing teams) maintained positive, unifying meaning. Instead of performing an action that could have been deemed divisive by relevant stakeholders, the COU was mostly supported by media and fans. Further, awareness through both traditional and social communication channels enhanced the positive impact it achieved. In a time of political discord throughout the nation—which can especially be seen on social media—the COU presents the impact that a simple gesture can have for a team, fan base, and community. While the COU was certainly a demonstration of college athletes taking an activist position, curiously, there was almost no mention of athlete activism among the words of the case study interview subjects. This is perhaps because of the approach taken by the team. While feelings of angst and frustration underpinned the creation of the gesture, and while other concurrent demonstrations were seen as more confrontational (Cooper et al., 2019), the COU ultimately was a demonstration of togetherness.

The current study explored college athlete activism through the lenses of SI and CRT. Heeding the call from Agyemang et al. (2010) to dig deeper into a case of athlete activism, this study focused on ODU's COU as a PDAA that utilizes the power of a symbol to bring awareness and structural change (Cooper et al., 2019). The study sought to examine the gesture itself—the public, arms-linked-and-raised display performed before ODU football games throughout the 2016 season—as athlete activism that utilizes the power of a symbol. The study also surveyed the embedded racial dynamics surrounding the issue, attempting to ascertain the role race played in the creation and the impact of the symbol. By critically examining the COU through stakeholder interviews, the study sought to assess the power of a symbol in activist actions in the athletic sphere.

A directed content analysis predicted many of the themes that would emerge from the interview transcripts. Outcomes resulting from the COU included enhanced connection within the ODU team, national attention, and the creation of a nonprofit organization. However, the nonprofit, Children 4 Humanity, operated in a diminished capacity in 2017, then was also discontinued. Wilder, meanwhile, resigned in December 2019 following three straight losing seasons (Kercheval, 2019). Further,

news emerged in mid-2020, as the U.S. elevated racial tensions with the killing of George Floyd, among other unarmed Black men and women, that Coach Wilder commandeered the player's movement (Winkler, 2020). Therefore, while short-term results included positive outcomes to the team and community, the COU seemingly failed to achieve any significant long-term impact to the program, community, or systems and structures.

The support and constraints surrounding one group of college athletes' desire to express their feelings about the systemic oppression and racial injustice in the U.S. was evident through the actions of the 2016 Old Dominion University football team in creating the Circle of Unity. The use of a circle and its positive response stood in contrast to other symbols utilized by both college and professional athletes that were deemed controversial. As athletes at all levels continue to face challenges amidst the social issues within the U.S., the current case provides credence for the role of the symbol in activist displays and also brings attention to both the supporting and constraining forces at play in athlete activists' desires to achieve their goals.

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Appendix A. A List of Interview Questions Asked

To Bobby Wilder

1. Take us back to the week of September 24 last fall. What was your reaction when players came to you wanting to express their strong feelings about the recent police-related violence in Charlotte?
2. How did that discussion with your football team's leaders morph into the Circle of Unity display?
3. How aware were you of differing viewpoints about this highly-charged issue within members of the football program?
4. How aware were you of differing viewpoints about this highly-charged issue within the Monarch fan community?
5. How was the decision made to allow the students to make their public demonstration, but then create what is now known as the Circle of Unity?
6. While the first demonstration of the Circle of Unity was being undertaken, what was your belief about fans' perception of the gesture?
7. After the game was over and you explained the actions through the media, what was the fans' reaction to the gesture?
8. Why did you want to continue the Circle of Unity gesture throughout the season
9. What do you think is the lasting impression of the Circle of Unity?

To Bruce Stewart

1. When were you informed of the plans for the two political demonstrations before the Texas-San Antonio game, the players' wearing "Black Lives Matter" shirts, and the Circle of Unity?
2. What was your reaction when you heard this information?
3. What instructions, if any, did you convey to Coach Wilder or other members of the football program?
4. As an athletic leader of the University, what type of reaction did you receive after the first game where the Circle of Unity was displayed?
5. What was the most negative piece of feedback you received?
6. What was the most positive piece of feedback you received?
7. The Circle of Unity continued through the season. What direction did you give the football program about the gesture for the rest of the season?
8. What meaning do you think observers attached to this gesture?
9. What do you think is the lasting impression of the Circle of Unity?

To Rashaad Coward

1. The week of the Texas-San Antonio Game, I have been informed that you were one of the football team leaders who approached Coach Wilder. What did you tell him?
2. What was Coach Wilder's reaction?
3. Before that game, you and other players wore "Black Lives Matter" shirts during warmups. Why did you do that?
4. Then you participated in the Circle of Unity gesture. Why did you do that?
5. What feedback did you receive from inside the football program about the demonstrations?
6. What feedback did you receive from outside the football program about the demonstrations?
7. What is your opinion of the Circle of Unity gestures continuing throughout the season, and expanding to include the other team when they wanted to participate?
8. What effect did participation in the process have on you individually?
9. What do you think is the lasting impression of the Circle of Unity?

To Harry Minium

1. When did you find out about plans for gestures by members of the ODU football team before the Texas-San Antonio game?
2. What did you see on the field during warmups?
3. What was the reaction of fans in the stadium during the displays?
4. What reaction did you receive from *Virginian-Pilot* readers after you wrote about the "Black Lives Matter" and Circle of Unity displays?
5. In what way, if any, did the reaction from readers change as the displays continued throughout the season?
6. What were your interactions like with Bobby Wilder when you discussed this issue?
7. What do you think is the lasting impression of the Circle of Unity?

To Larry Eakin

1. Take us back to September 24, 2016. You were in the stadium before the Texas-San Antonio game. What did you see?
2. What was the reaction of fans in the stadium to the display?
3. What was your reaction when you read about the display, and its designation as the Circle of Unity, in media reports published after the game?
4. When you discussed the Circle of Unity with other ODU fans, what did you say?
5. What do you think of the Circle of Unity?
6. To what degree do you feel that sentiment is commonplace among fans of ODU football?
7. What do you think is the lasting impression of the Circle of Unity?

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Post-Recession Decision-Making Associated with Adding NCAA Division I Sports Programs

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Recent college sport headlines highlight the decision to cut teams during the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, a number of institutions are charging forward and have announced the addition of a team(s) to their athletic offerings. Plymouth State will add men's swimming, Indiana Tech is adding women's ice hockey, and Augustana College just added men and women's water polo. Such additions are somewhat surprising given the difficult economic climate currently facing higher education and intercollegiate athletics.

This study sought to identify a structure that NCAA Division I decision-makers took part in when adding a team in previous years. Accordingly, the authors conducted expert-based, in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 15 Division I athletic administrators representing 23 sport teams. The following decision-making phases were identified: Identification, Justification, Evaluation, Acceptance (or Interruptions), and Authorization. Theoretical and practical implications for institutions seeking to grow their sport offerings are provided.

Keywords: intercollegiate athletics, decision-making, athletic administration, NCAA, Title IX

Researchers have examined the impact of removing college football programs at National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I institutions (Hutchinson & Berg, 2015; Jones, 2014). Primarily associated with the theory of escalation of commitment, the decision-making process for the removal or addition of NCAA Division I sports have been well established (Hutchinson & Berg, 2015; Jones, 2014). Specifically, in 1981, when the NCAA began tracking intercollegiate athletic participation numbers for men and women, the numbers illustrate the escalation of commitment to grow athletic programs. According to Irick (2019), the number of championship sport teams within NCAA institutions increased to a new high of 19,886 for the 2018-19 academic year; broken down by gender this equates to 10,660 women's teams and 9,226 men's teams.

Despite this growth, which illustrates universities' strong escalation of commitment to athletics (Hutchinson & Berg, 2015; Jones, 2014), there is a paucity of

research examining the decision-making process related to the addition or removal of a sport on campus. Leaders across universities and in the athletic departments risk falling into entrapment during decision-making; the process to overcommit or escalate to a decision to justify the initial decision and resources, even if the decision becomes ineffective (Brockner et al., 1986). The literature suggests a number of factors may contribute to the decision-making process, including leadership, expectations of post-recession economics, and potential university-wide impact (Burton & Welty Peachey, 2014; Mahony & DeSchriver, 2008).

The decision-making process is a particular aspect in need of further examination within the escalation (or de-escalation, when commitments are reversed or stopped) of commitment phenomenon of adding a sport. This is especially salient given the current state of college athletics and the economic downturn of the United States during COVID-19. A lack of research linking the decision-making process that athletic departments engaged in to the adding or removing of a sport team is surprising, given the important role that finances and revenue play in adding and removing a collegiate sport (Hutchinson & Bouchet, 2014a). Current leaders and decision-makers of college athletic departments can be better served in their decisions to add or remove a sport during the COVID-19 economic downturn by examining what decision-making processes worked well, and what processes did not work well in the past, during a similar economic downturn.

The need to understand various factors in the decision-making process is further emphasized given the costly nature of engaging in the escalation of commitment (Staw, 1981). Researchers found that despite the media attention on programs removed post-recession, more programs, specifically football, were added in the years immediately after the 2008 recession (Armstrong, 2009; Axson, 2014). Further, the effects of adding a football program have led to an increase in student applications, while also leading to a decline in student quality and retention over time (van Holm & Zook, 2016). Decisions by leaders in athletic departments in early 2020 have already began to take shape as numerous universities have announced additions of sport teams, such as Plymouth State adding men's swimming, Indiana Tech adding women's ice hockey, and Augustana College adding men's and women's water polo. While the escalation of commitment research related to adding a sport program to a college has focused on economic feasibility studies (van Holm & Zook, 2016), and financial data of athletic departments (Mahony & DeSchriver, 2008), little research has focused on the inner-workings or factors related to the decision-making processes to add a sport program. Therefore, the purpose of the current study is to examine what the decision-making processes were when college athletic departments engaged in adding a team to their sport offerings. Further, we fit the decision-making processes into a model to help guide future collegiate sport administrators who may engage in deciding to add a sport to their institutions. Given the important and cyclical relationship between leaders, organizational culture, and decision-making (Schein, 2010), we determined it necessary to focus on the leaders of NCAA Division I athletic departments, athletic directors, and related administrators, who were identified to have been directly involved in the decision to add a sport to their respective university programs.

Theoretical and Contextual Framework and Review of Literature

Given our interest in examining the decision-making process and applying the process to the current economic downturn stemming from COVID-19, we decided to limit data to schools that engaged in the adding or removing of a team during a similar economic downturn; post-2008 recession (2009-16). During this time period, researchers documented a significant decline in certain college sport spending, including team travel, and university-level discussions on eliminating sports (Hutchinson & Berg, 2015; Mahony & DeSchriver, 2008). We looked at teams that had just been added, those institutions which had committed to adding, and a third group of institutions still determining whether or not to add in the coming years.

Historical records for each institution demonstrated that at some point in time, each university has added one or more teams to gain or maintain the NCAA minimum requirements of teams to remain complaint. However, in many institutional cases, years passed, and conditions and circumstances may have changed. Thus, an institution interested in adding a new sport would likely be dealing with a new process, and is considered unstructured because no predetermined and explicit set of ordered responses exist.

In 2010, Getz and Siegfried (2010) postulated that adding a sport might increase university exposure and thus, increase enrollment. Specifically, Getz and Siegfried stated:

> . . . as a form of advertising and public relations or as the consumption of entertainment services, intercollegiate athletics may attract students, thus substituting alternative recruitment expenditures. Simply having Division I sports teams seem to matter more than the success of the teams (p. 359).

Allen (1999) further suggested the presence of a "Flutie Factor", which represents the "appearance" itself by the team or by individual athletes in post-season play, can positively benefit an institution through better imaging and branding (Brooker & Kloastorian, 1981; McCormick & Tinsley, 1987).

In addition to increasing the pool of students who apply to a university, several studies illustrated having an NCAA Division I program attracts more students with higher SAT scores (McCormick & Tinsley, 1987; Sand & Sloane, 2004). Thus, a larger pool of students attracted to a school due to the athletic program enables an institution to enroll fewer students needing financial assistance (Getz & Siegfried, 2010). The exact effect of adding a sport program to the quality of a student that a university then attracts remains unclear. van Holm and Zook (2016) found the quality of students added to a university actually declines over time when football is added, potentially due to a relationship between more applicants from a broader academic background wanting to be part of college football's sense of community. Additionally, studies on financial donors demonstrate evidence that alumni who participated in intercollegiate athletics donated more than alumni who did not (Clotfelter, 2003; Monks, 2003; Wunnava & Lauze, 2001).

Additional factors impacting college athletic offerings include addressing the need for reform on the field and in the classroom (Benford, 2007), commercialism and amateurism (Bowen & Levin, 2003), academic integrity (Batley, 2011), and gender equity (Lawrence, Ott & Hendricks, 2009). As such, the literature provides a number of factors for an athletic director to consider when adding NCAA sports to their offerings. Despite the various factors illustrated by other researchers, there has yet to be a focus on compiling the various factors into a decision-making model. A better understanding of such decision-making processes is warranted.

The Structure of Unstructured Decision Process

The Structure of Unstructured Decision Process Framework focuses on identifying a structure to describe the unstructured process of strategic decision making at senior levels of organizations through three phases. Mintzberg, Raisinghani, and Theoret (1976) defined a decision as a specific commitment to action (usually a commitment of resources), and a decision-process as a set of actions and dynamic factors that begin with the identification of stimulus for action, and ends with the specific commitment to action. The term "unstructured" refers to decision processes that have not been previously encountered or views of a different form or process for which no predetermined and explicit set of ordered responses exists. The term "strategic" means important actions taken, resources committed, or precedents set (Mintzberg et al., 1976).

The framework of the unstructured process starts with the identification phase where the problem is recognized, a decision is required, and there is a difference between information about the actual situation and the expected standard. Collectively, these factors signal a need for a decision based around the problem which is subsequently clarified and defined. Next comes the selection phase, where a choice is made by screening and evaluating those factors surrounding the encountered problem, potential interruptions, or stopping points and alternates that could be offered or factors that can blocked. Ultimately, the final phase is authorization. We believe that this framework can be applied to decisions to adding or removing sports, particularly when combined with the escalation and de-escalation of commitment phenomena.

Escalation of Commitment

Escalation of commitment is best described as the negative aspects associated when decision-makers continue to allocate more resources to a sunk cost or initiative (Bouchet & Hutchinson, 2010). Escalation of commitment has often been combined with entrapment (Brockner, Shaw, & Rubin, 1979) for a number of decades. Entrapment is described as the continued commitment to an action displayed by a decision-maker in the face of the action having negative effects, at times putting forth more resources to attempt to turnaround the action into positive results despite a low likelihood of such an outcome (Brockner & Rubin, 1985). Effectively, escalation of commitment and entrapment involve leaders basing current decisions on the amount of time and money already spent on prior decisions and incorporating the opinions of

too many stakeholders until the main tenets of the decision at hand become convoluted (Bouchet & Hutchinson, 2010; Brockner et al., 1986). As a leader feels trapped within their previous decisions, they continue to commit to the decision, particularly when there is public knowledge about the parameters surrounding the decision (Brockner et al., 1979). Specifically, Brockner and colleagues (1979) found that when participants in an investment experiment publicly noted their limit of investment and had to make active decisions to continue the investment, participants were less likely to diverge from their earlier, publicly stated limit. Additionally, Brockner et al. (1986) found that when decision-makers faced negative feedback, their escalation of commitment to a decision was higher than those who faced less negative or positive feedback. Related to the same findings, Brockner and colleagues also noted that decision-makers risk becoming further entrapped in their commitment when their identification with the outcomes is highly evident. For example, an athletic director pushing to add a sport that they have publicly championed for, therefore tying their own identity to the addition of a sport, will cause the athletic director to pursue adding the sport even in the face of negative consequences of the outcome, because their identity has been engrained with the outcome of adding the sport. The athletic director is much less likely to reverse course and suggest that the sport not be added, similar to how Brockner et al. (1986) described the danger of identity and decision-making becoming intertwined. This illustrates that when limits or parameters of decisions are publicly known, leaders and decision-makers are more likely to continue on the initial decision and escalate their commitment due to entrapment from public knowledge about the decision.

Escalation of commitment has centered on the connection of five key determinants in an organization throughout time; social, organizational, project, contextual, and psychological (Ross & Staw, 1993). The social determinant is centered on one's internal processes to reconcile modeling others' behavior and cultural norms expected of leaders in decision-making situations (Bouchet & Hutchinson, 2011; Ross & Staw, 1993). Ultimately, social determinants dictate a person's resistance to admit a mistake in their decision-making for the sake of maintaining credibility (Ross & Staw, 1986). Bouchet and Hutchinson (2011) illustrated an example of social determinants when an NCAA university removes programs and risks losing credibility with their key stakeholders (i.e., alumni, students, and donors).

Organizational determinant is based on aspects of public support for the organization's decision, economic and technical investments into the decision, and how well aligned the decision is with the organization's existing values (Bouchet & Hutchinson, 2011; Goodman, Bazerman, & Conlon, 1980). An example of the organizational determinant within the NCAA is how a university relates the athletic department with the brand and marketing efforts of the university as a whole, rather than separating the athletic department and teams from the rest of campus (Bouchet & Hutchinson, 2011). Next, the project determinant is focused on the economic impact of a decision (Ross & Staw, 1993). As it relates to NCAA program decisions at the university level, the project determinant is an important aspect for athletic department personnel to vet, given the uncertainty of long-term financial effects that

decisions hold (Hutchinson & Bouchet, 2014b). According to Ross and Staw (1993), the contextual determinant incorporates those forces and aspects related to the organization's decision, which expand beyond the organization's boundaries (i.e., beyond their physical facilities). Bouchet and Hutchinson (2011) noted how the escalation decisions for collegiate athletic departments involve and affect stakeholders beyond the campus and playing fields of the athletic departments, such as external stakeholders within the university's state education board of directors. Lastly, the psychological determinant is centered on how one processes their decisions in such a way that leads to the manipulation of data and facts to align with their desired decision's outcome (Ross & Staw, 1993). Within the current context, the psychological determinant would involve a university leadership team manipulating a feasibility study to show a positive return on investment for adding a sport program.

The five escalation of commitment determinants provide a foundation for understanding the forces surrounding the decision-making process of adding a sport program in an athletic department. Much of the research on collegiate escalation of commitment centered on adding programs (see: Bouchet & Hutchinson, 2010; 2011; Roy, Graeff, & Harmon, 2008), however; Hutchinson and Bouchet (2014a; 2014b) focused on de-escalation of collegiate athletic programs and advanced the understanding of how colleges add or remove sport programs.

De-escalation behaviors involve the ceasing or reversing of escalation commitment decisions, in the hopes of avoiding or minimizing negative effectives of previous escalation initiatives (Hutchinson & Bouchet, 2014b). Further, Keil and Robey (1999) along with Hutchinson and Bouchet (2014b) noted that a finite outcome of de-escalation can be project termination, if a reversal of escalation commitment cannot be achieved. Therefore, it is important that athletic department leaders weigh all escalation determinants and corresponding outcomes before enacting a decision that may need to be de-escalated or terminate the initiative completely at a later time. Oftentimes, examples of de-escalation have involved removing athletic programs or lowering a university's athletic department level of play (for example from Division I to Division II) (Hutchinson & Bouchet, 2014a). One of the key and contrary findings from Hutchinson & Bouchet's (2014a) work was the importance of limiting stakeholder input in the decision-making process to de-escalate. Given the overwhelming financial and credibility-based reasons involved in de-escalating (Bouchet & Hutchinson, 2011; Hutchinson & Bouchet, 2014b), through the project determinant, limiting stakeholder input (such as alumni, students, and donors) is an important aspect to ensuring the decision-making process to de-escalate does not overemphasize the contextual determinant.

Despite a foundation of research within the escalation of commitment and the de-escalation of commitment phenomena in collegiate athletics, the current research is lacking an understanding of the phenomena's underlying decision-making processes. Exploring the decision-making processes related to adding or removing an athletic team stands as significantly important, given the potential for wasted valuable resources if a university escalates their commitment to a poor decision. Therefore, to help guide our study, we constructed the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the decision-making phases considered when adding a team to a university's athletic department?

RQ2: What might the new decision-making model look like when adding a team to a university's athletic department?

Methods

Similar to a recent study, which examined 15 Division I athletic administrators (representing 23 sport teams) who participated in the sport adoption process (Milstein & Dixon, 2019), our current study involved Division I athletic administrators who were identified as involved in the sport adoption process at their institutions during the 2009-16 time period. The current study endeavors to better understand decision-making factors that involve hierarchical influences present both internally and externally to the university. As such, we outline our research parameters and participants below.

Identifying Research Parameters

Based on the argument presented earlier, we concluded that the intercollegiate athletic context post-2008 recession would not only offer insight into the decision-making processes, but also contribute topical implications for current athletic administrators during and after the COVD-19 economic downturn. Accordingly, the range of consideration for the current study is 2009-2016. Historical records of each institution revealed that, during the 2009-16 period, each university in our sample added one or more sports to gain or maintain the NCAA minimums of 14 sports, six male and eight female teams. However, in many institutional cases, years have passed and conditions and circumstances may have changed. Therefore, an institution interested in adding a new sport would likely be dealing with a new process, and is considered unstructured because no predetermined and explicit set of ordered responses exists.

Participants

A purposive sampling approach was used to identify NCAA Division I Athletic directors who fit the above-mentioned study parameters from the NCAA database, and regional Conference Commissioners and Coaches' Associations, and were contacted via e-mail. Subsequently, 15 individuals were recruited to participate in the study (see Table 1); eight identified as male and seven as female, representing six conferences and schools of various sizes. Job titles included: Athletic Director, Director of Athletics, Director of Administration (In Athletics), Deputy Director of Athletics, Vice President of Athletics, Senior Associate Athletic Director, and Associate Athletic Director. Ten of these individuals served in the institutions' highest level of administration (e.g., Athletic Directors, Director of Athletics, Vice President of Athletics) and five held roles associated with a Senior Athletic Administrator (e.g., Senior Associate athletic directors and Associate athletic directors).

Table 1

Participants' Job Titles

Level of Administration	Title	Number of Participants	Dual Role as Senior Women's Administrator	Gender
Highest Level	Athletic Director	3		Male
	Director of Athletics	3		Male
	Director of Administration (In Athletics)	1		Male
	Deputy Director of Athletics	1	1	Female
	Vice President of Athletics	1		Male
Senior Level	Senior Associate Athletic Director	3	3	Female
	Associate Athletic Director	1		Male
		2	1	Female
Total		15	5	

Procedures

Using a semi-structured interview protocol (Siritarungsri, Grant, & Francis, 2013), participants were interviewed and audio recorded by phone. The protocol was constructed based on the aforementioned literature related to decision-making processes (Mintzberg et al., 1976). Supplemental questions were used to ensure depth to each answer was received, as is often the case for semi-structured interviews (Siritarungsri et al.,2013). This interview method is well-suited for exploring the decision-making process and enabled us to probe for more information and the clarification of answers. Specifically, Siritarungsri, Grant, and Francis (2013) noted the use of "elite" personnel, or context experts such that the interviewee "can open up little-known aspects of governance, policy and professional culture, and add quality and credibility to qualitative research" (Siritarungsri et al., 2013, p. 75). The protocol began by building rapport with the participant and then moved on to more interpretive and exploratory questions (Siritarungsri et al., 2013). Following each interview, the audio transcription was uploaded to a transcribing service, and then reviewed for accuracy. Transcribed interviews were imported into the ATLAST.ti program to assist in the organization of data and facilitate the identification of themes by coding.

Data were collected until interviews were complete or no new information was uncovered and redundancy had been reached within the process, the procedures, and the scope of the study. A matrix was designed to determine the optimal number of 21 participants for this study, dividing them by sport category, sport gender and size of institution (see Table 2). The actual number of participants in this study was 15 because in the Emerging Sport category (Women's Equestrian) and the Mixed Sport

category (Rifle Shooting, Fencing, and Skiing) no institutions fit the parameters of this study. Within the categories of men's and women's individual sports at a small school, so few programs were added that the researchers became concerned about ensuring true anonymity.

Table 2

Interview Matrix for Actual Participants

Category of Sport	Small School 1,000-2,999 students	Medium School 3,000-9,999 students	Large School 10,000 and more students	Number of Teams per Category
Men's Individual Championship Sport	No School Fits These Parameters	Track Golf	Golf	3
Women's Individual Championship Sport	No School Fits These Parameters	Golf (2) Tennis Track	Golf (2) Tennis	7
Men's Team Championship Sport	Football Lacrosse	Lacrosse Soccer	Baseball	5
Women's Team Championship Sport	Sport TBD Lacrosse	Lacrosse	Soccer	4
Women's Individual Emerging Sport	No School Fits These Parameters	No School Fits These Parameters	No School Fits These Parameters	0
Women's Team Emerging Sport	Sand Volleyball	Sand Volleyball	Sand Volleyball (2)	4
Mixed Championship Sport	No School Fits These Parameters	No School Fits These Parameters	No School Fits These Parameters	0
Total per Institutional Size	5	10	8	23

While the ideal number of participants was set at 21, the 15 actual participants, whose institutions are summarized in Table 2 represent all three of the Carnegie Foundation classifications for school sizes. Three schools were classified as small (3) <2,999 undergraduate students, four as Medium (4) between 3,000-9,999 undergraduate students and seven as large (7) >10,000 undergraduate students. The Carnegie Classification™ is a framework for recognizing and describing institutional diversity in U.S. higher education for the past four decades. This framework is widely used in the study of higher education, both as a way to represent and control for institutional differences, and also in the design of research studies to ensure adequate representation of sampled institutions, students, or faculty (carnegiefoundation.org 2013). In addition to school sizes, the institutions represented were from six different regions of the country, thus participating in six different conferences. The following regions were represented in this study: Northeast, Southeast, Mid-Atlantic, Midwest, Southwest, and the West Coast.

Data Coding and Analysis

The process of coding the transcripts involved "taking text data gathered during data collection, segmenting the sentences or paragraphs into categories, and labeling those categories with a term" (Creswell, 2009, p.186). We also analyzed transcripts in accordance with Patton's (1990) strategies for data analysis (i.e., the process of identifying, coding, and categorizing the primary patterns in the data individually). The coding process consisted of two cycles. First, in-vivo coding with analytic memoing was used to direct the language of the participants as codes (Saldaña, 2016). This coding allowed us to return to the data to inspect, interrogate, and interpret the results to find patterns and explanations during the second cycle of coding (Richards, 2005). Label coding was initially derived from descriptive factors listed in the interview protocol. Annotations that occurred during the interviews, such as participant expressions or attitudes, were added to the transcripts. Next, we considered the importance of the notations by using analytical memos added to the transcripts (Saldaña, 2016). Once the initial transcript was coded, links were made from one set of data (i.e., one participant's account) to another. Following annotations, we reviewed the transcripts, and ideas or a theme's memos were added that came to light. Lastly, we again included linkages between related themes in participants' accounts. Finally, after coding the last of the participant information, we revisited the earlier coded participant interviews for any added clarity and observation that came to light.

Peer Debriefing and Inter-rater Agreement

A panel of five individuals consisting of two athletic directors not participating in the study, one enrollment and admission specialist, and two graduate students, participated in both the peer debriefing and inter-rater agreement, so as to reduce potential researcher bias. Each member of the panel reviewed participant transcripts and discussed emergent themes with the first author individually. In addition, three inter-raters were emailed a list of codes with corresponding definitions and three randomly selected transcripts. These individuals independently coded the transcripts by hand and shared their findings with the researchers. Next, these individuals were provided a draft of the findings to determine if they agreed with the interpretations. After all materials were reviewed, it was determined that there was consensus in both transcript coding and emergent theme development.

Findings and Discussion

Emerging Patterns for Decision-Making

Overall, findings demonstrated a varied process exhibited among study participants about who originated the idea of adding a sport, along with an associated justification and evaluation. In addition, findings highlighted the inclusion process of a variety of stakeholders demonstrating the need to gain institutional support, and obtain authorization before formal implementation. The combination of the two lines of research (unstructured decision-making and escalation of commitment) led us to answer RQ1

Table 3

Theoretical Frame and Emerging Approach Summarized

	Theoretical Framework	Emerging Approach
Phase 1:	Identification, stimulus and clarification of the problem.	Opportunity to add a sport presents itself through a driving force.
Phase 2:	Development, solutions are sought out.	Justification for adding the sport must be presented.
Phase 3:	Selection, choice is made by screening and evaluating.	Evaluation of sport to determine if it is a good fit at the institution.
Interruptions:	Alternates could be offered up or the initiative could be blocked altogether.	Acceptance must be gained by key stakeholders or sport will not be added.
Phase 4:	Authorization	Authorization

(what are the decision-making phases considered when adding a team to a university's athletic department?) through the following themes that emerged from the data: (1) Driving forces, (2) Justification, (3) Evaluation, (4) Acceptance, (5) Authorization, and (6) Approach and Leadership. Our findings are presented in Table 3. We present the themes with supporting quotes in the following pages.

Initial Discussion

Escalation of commitment is easily associated with the sport arms race, such as building bigger and better facilities, bringing on big contract coaches, and the recruitment benefits that result from these facets for both student-athletes and the general student body (Getz & Siegfried, 2010). The climate of athletics has changed drastically in the last 40 years with an increased call for accountability in academics, recruiting, gender equity, and an expectation of sound fiscal practices from both inside and outside of the institutions. Because of the more complex nature of today's higher education environment, the responsibilities of athletic administrators are increasingly demanding. Decisions made must consider the impact on the students, the departments, the institution, and the external environment.

From the findings of this research the Proposed Decision-making Process to Add a Sport to NCAA Division I Institutions model has emerged demonstrating a number of feedbacks, accountability, or buy in loops exist in regards to adding sports. As the findings for each phase are discussed they are framed through the unstructured process, adapted to college sport, and considered through the lens of escalation of commitment.

Driving Forces

Within the decision-making process, there is often a discussion about solving a problem. The addition of a sport involves fulfilling the minimum NCAA membership requirement to comply with gender equity mandates or boosting enrollment. However, at some institutions, athletic directors also discussed that being visionary or future oriented, getting in on the ground floor of a new sport, or connecting with students, alumni or the community, were their driving forces for adding a sport. Examples are presented below from a student driven, administrator, athletic department, and trustee perspective.

> [Student Driven] I think the initial interest was driven by the student body. The student government association and the executive committee initiated and advocated for a student referendum to help fund the program. [They] presented an extensive list of students' signatures to the university administration who then put together a formal proposal for adoption by the board of trustees (*Interview #9, Football, Large School*).

> [Institutional Administrator] A new Chancellor came in and decided, probably five-years ago, that it would be studied (*Interview #5, Football, Large School*).

> [Athletic Department] The notion stemmed from within athletics. Partially it was a little visionary towards the sport [of lacrosse], it's growing and booming, especially in the Northeast and Middle Atlantic area, and [volleyball] was beginning to make inroads . . . so this is an opportunity to sort of, be on the cutting edge, by adding two additional sports that were becoming more popular *(Interview #7, Women's Sand Volleyball and Women's Lacrosse, Small School).*

> [Trustee] I would say we have to give credit to the Trustees. There was a particular Trustee who actually chaired the Admissions Committee of the Trustees, and felt that it would be strategically a plus for us in our recruiting and so forth. He brought the idea and actually made a gift of a million and a half dollars to help us [with] the cost of getting started *(Interview #10, Men's and Women's Lacrosse, Medium School).*

Discussion on Driving Forces and the Social Determinant Association

Highlighted as a social determinant was a risk of losing credibility with key stakeholders such as alumni, students, and donors. In a number of cases it was a stakeholding group that proposed the sport adoption initiative as noted above and the community who supported the initiative as suggested below.

> [Support for Facility] Now, golf we already have a financial gift for. We have a short game facility that is off campus that our men have; and we already have the gift secured to add a wing for the women's golf. We've got a significant plan. *(Women's Individual, Large School)*.

> [Competition Support] We find more and more companies are beginning to provide sponsorship. They are not going to get involved as our big sponsor, but they are willing to become a lower level sponsor. *(Men's and Women's Team, Small School)*.

> [Support for Adding] That [donor support] was a factor, and that was up there with the fiscal feasibility . . . It was feasible for us to add it, but it was more feasible because we had the support of some big boosters in the area *(Men's Individual, Large School)*.

Justification

Our findings suggest that it was not always a person or a group who initiated the process of adding a sport. Rather, it was a mandated requirement by the NCAA which fell into three categories: (1) NCAA membership requirements, (2) conference membership requirements, or (3) gender equity compliance. Quotes below provide examples for these findings:

> [Conference Membership Requirement] We are actually transitioning all of our sports from Division II to Division I. Whenever we started looking at doing that, the first thing you have to do is find a conference. That's your first step: Find a conference who will take you. The [XYZ] conference was interested, but they identify six sports of interest that they required all of their membership to have *(Interview #14, Men's and Women's Lacrosse, Medium School).*

> [Compliance] No, sand volleyball was in a sense, a replacement for dropping a men's and women's sport (*Interview #7, Sand Volleyball, Small School).*

> [NCAA Membership Requirement] We had been in the NCAA before, and the president that came into the university in 2006, wanted to move back to the NCAA" *(Men's Team, Small School).*

Discussion of the Justification Phase Associated with the Organizational Determinant

The organizational determinant is based on gaining public support and aligning with existing values. The previous quotes demonstrate that each sport provided a utility and was addressing a gap in the institution whether it be a gender equity initiative, compliance, or a conference requirement. In addition, this determinant speaks to athletics and in this case an individual sport being part of the university's marketing initiative rather producing separate efforts.

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> [Strategic Marketing] I think what part of the brilliance of this is in conjunction with the creation of football, the University has strategically initiated a national student recruitment program where the core of our students are going to come

from . . . [new regions]. Now, we have active recruiters in . . . [in various regions throughout the country] and any time that our logo, that our brand, that our awareness can say, "Well, who is that?" and "Oh, they have physical therapy. They have chemical engineering. They are Carnegie Research Institution." The benefits: it's hard to put a number on it and point to it and say, "There I told you. But it is there." *(Men's Team Sport, Large School).*

Evaluation

While all institutions share some commonalities, each program will have a different culture or conditions related to their consideration of adopting a team for their program. Use of multiple lenses, such as athletic competitiveness, compliance, financial, community connection, and impact on individual and affiliated stakeholder groups, was evident during the evaluation phase. Actual evaluation occurred in the proposal of adding the sport: when narrowing down the sport options, when considering financial feasibility, and when obtaining institutional acceptance. This phase occurred mostly within the university, but on occasion evaluation occurred outside of the university, with the approval of stakeholders or external consultants, whose assistance and guidance is provided for an example below.

[Athletic Department] This is a working document that we've used, I would say for three years probably. I had an intern start it in the summer probably three years ago, maybe even longer. We just keep adding to it. We've gotten it down to about four sports now (*Women's Individual: Large* School).

It came from the university as a whole: the Trustees, the Admission, and the President's Office saying we think this can be strategic in helping us recruit in these areas, and we think it's something that we would like to do. "Athletics, what do you think?" How about doing the legwork and finding out the details, cost and that sort of thing *(Interview #1, Men's Football and Women's TBD: Small School).*

[External Consultant] The thing I've always recognized is that there are people smarter than me out there. That's why I used this Title IX specialist to come in and do the evaluations because I think you got to make sure that what you're adding meets all the criteria, that it's not just an impulse deal. When you add a sport, it has value, and value across the board as a program, and what it does for your overall athletic program; and does it enhance it? And the investment you put into it; is there a return on it that's positive and it fits all the criteria? *(Interview #11, Women's Sand Volleyball and Women's Golf, Women's Individual, Large School).*

Discussion Associated with the Contextual and Project Determinants

This determinant considers both internal and external stakeholders as well as impact. From the quote below the athletic administrator points to a number of stakeholders

who were involved in the decision to add football at the school. Football has been known to provide students an opportunity to participate in a traditional college experience, while the community often feels a positive economic impact connected to the hospitality industry. The sentiment below considers a number of stakeholders but also points to the project determinant focused on the economic impact of a decision.

> [Community Acceptance] . . . would say there are outside entities that were very involved: the City, the County, the Chamber of Commerce, alumni, [and] donors. The conference provided a very significant amount of data. Financial data and operational data were examined from other institutions that had created a football program in the last 10 to 15 years. There was a great deal of outside input but logistically, operationally, and financially, the plan was put together by a combination of athletic and university administration *(Interview #9, Men's Football, Large School).*

These findings present an interesting note as the theoretical model suggests seeking out solutions or a de-escalation exit strategy (Hutchinson & Bouchet, 2014b), while the emerging process recognizes that the sport being considered may be the only choice because it is a requirement, or because the sport was being considered due to its popularity. For example, adding (escalating) or not adding lacrosse (de-escalating exit strategy) would be the only option versus adding lacrosse or water polo (only escalating with no de-escalating exit strategy). Rather than a comparative analysis between multiple sports, a feasibility analysis took place to determine if the sport was a good fit athletically, academically, and socially; and would the benefits outweigh the costs for that institution?

Acceptance

Whether or not the sport being added was a part of a requirement or a request, a level of buy-in was part of the process. Most athletic directors mentioned a need to make sure that a majority of the departments, faculty, and staff was on-board prior to any public announcements being made about the sport. Community opinion also became a necessary part of the decision-making process.

> [Faculty] It didn't slow the decision-makers' thinking down by any means. There were certainly questions among faculty about spending this money. Our President was very open and very public about his enthusiasm about it. Faculty questioned whether we should be spending that much money *(Interview #10, Men's and Women's' Lacrosse, Small School).*

> [Institutional Administration] . . . We did a pretty comprehensive presentation and the President was supportive of that *(Interview #6, Women's Soccer, Large School).*

> [Low Resistance] It's something our athletic director and president saw [as] potential [as well as] the board of trustees. They brought admissions on board as an opportunity to increase enrollment, and the university made a commitment to do it. I don't think there was any pressure from anybody, because I think truthfully, we were naive to the sport (*Interview #7, Sand Volleyball, Small School).*

Discussion Associated with the Psychological Determinant

In regards to Escalation of Commitment, this determinant was concerned with processing of decisions in such a way that facts might be manipulated to reach justification for the desired decision. Over the past few decades there has been a call for more accountability and transparency within athletics. Not in every case, but from the findings most athletic administrators discussed that a feedback loop, accountability, and expectation of buy were expected before a sport could be adopted at their institution.

Authorization

Through the interview process, several directors highlighted who was involved in the approval and authorization of adding a sport. Findings here are summarized and supported by quotes from the participations.

> [Board of Trustees and Subcommittees] I think it unfolded at its own pace. There wasn't a deadline out there, but at the same time, I mean, it had a schedule of advancing. A, B and C needed to be accomplished to get it in a formal proposal, to be examined by subcommittees, so the board of trustees would then forward a recommendation to all the boards (*Interview #9, Football, Large School*).

> [President, Faculty and Board of Trustees] He was very forward-thinking and there was a segment of the faculty that was anti, but he had general support among the faculty. He had great support among the Board *(Interview #10, Men's and Women's Lacrosse, Medium School).*

> [President] We just took this to the President and she approved it; and she agreed. Not approved, but she agreed to that. We told her what we were doing, and she agreed with it. We don't want any committees on the campus or anything *(Interview #8, Women's Sand Volleyball, Small School).*

Approach and Leadership

To answer RQ2 (what might the new decision-making model look like when adding a team to a university's athletic department?), we summarized our findings and organized the new themes into a model in Figure 1: *Proposed Decision-making Process to Add a Sport to NCAA Division I Institutions.* The new model demonstrates the general path(s) the decision to add a sport takes at an institution based on our data. Depending on the driving force or originator of the idea to add the sport, the pro-

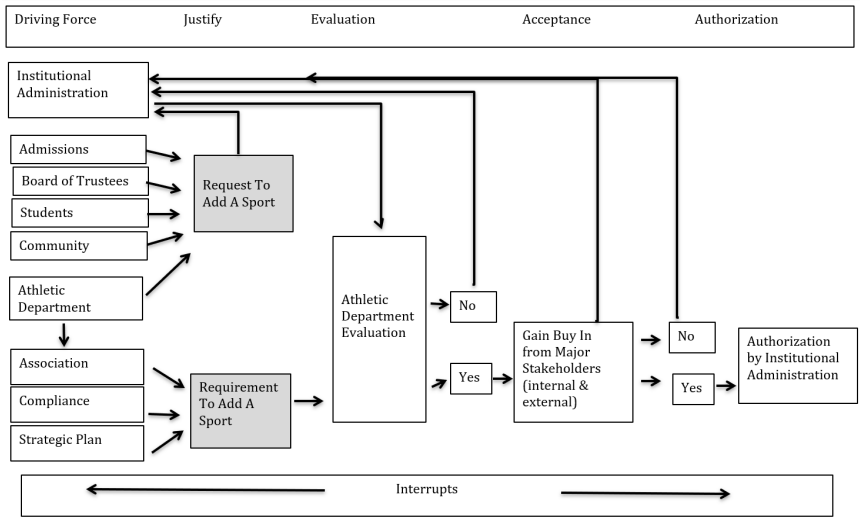

Figure 1. Proposed decision-making process to add a sport to NCAA Division I institutions.

cess might look slightly different. However, the findings illustrate common themes or phases of driving forces, justification, evaluation, acceptance, and authorization. While Table 3 describes the themes from our data, Figure 1 illustrates the themes in our new model, as they relate to the phases of Mintzberg et al.'s (1976) work. The themes are considered alongside of the elements of the theoretical framework used as a heuristic in this study, along with that of Mintzberg et al.'s (1976) Structure of "Unstructured" Decision Processes.

Our findings that present the process and emerging approach to add a sport are consistent with Mintzberg's (1976) Structure of "Unstructured" Decision Processes. However, the emerging process lends itself to a more transformational guide. The theoretical framework starts with identifying and clarifying a problem. However, the emerging approach can be more proactive in nature, enhancing or providing a new experience, or considering new opportunities.

The proposed decision-making process to add a sport to NCAA Division I institutions model illustrates the various phases of decision-making detailed with our emergent themes and data. We incorporated the first phase of the driving force of where the push to add a sport originated from, (such as: students, board of trustees, compliance, and the athletic department itself, among others), and linked this phase to phase 2, justification.

Justification helps to reaffirm the driving force, and poses as the first gatekeeper in the decision-making process. As we found, there are times when the justification stems from an NCAA mandate, which moved the process along quicker than when the justification was rooted from a different driving force.

Next, phase 3 involves the athletic department performing a robust evaluation of fit between the potential new sport and the institution. As our data suggest, this phase was primarily conducted internally within the athletic department and focused on financial feasibility while determining whether or not external acceptance of the additional sport would be positive or negative.

Acceptance is the next phase of our model, or to parallel Mintzberg et al. (1976), is positioned as the alternative interruption aspect. At the acceptance phase in our model, based on our data we found this to be the last critical barrier to adding a sport, and the last time that a potential de-escalation exit strategy could be implemented prior to the final phase of authorization. Acceptance involved gaining support from external stakeholders, after the internal evaluation phase was completed and successful in gaining final internal stakeholder support.

The last phase in our model is authorization, and occurs when all processes of the decision-making have been passed. Once this phase has been achieved, our data saw internal and external stakeholders give their final support and approval for the addition of the sport. We next discuss various implications of our findings while detailing limitations and future research.

General Discussion

As evidenced from our current findings, entrapment and escalation of commitment remain in the collegiate athletic decision-making processes (Brockner et al., 1986; Hutchinson & Bouchet, 2014b). However, our findings demonstrate an emerging decision-making process and model that emphasizes the acceptance phase and advances the understanding of the various determinants of escalation of commitment to add an intercollegiate sport. We, therefore, have advanced sport managers' and researchers' understanding of the escalation of commitment among the decision-making process of adding an intercollegiate sport. Additionally, in several instances, athletic directors cited, and advised, the need for gaining "buy in" from every level of the administration and key stakeholder groups (i.e., social determinants and contextual determinants) before formally adding the sport in question. This illustrates a built-in exit strategy of de-escalation if buy-in from every level of administration and stakeholders was not achieved from the beginning. The inclusion of everyone's support and buy-in with a complete understanding of the commitment warranted by the decision at hand helped leaders avoid escalating their commitment to the decision to add a sport later. Such inclusion of everyone's support to help avoid later escalation highlights Hutchinson and Bouchet's (2014b) notion to include exit strategies of de-escalation early in the decision-making process. Our findings corroborate this notion and we depict strategies with feedback arrows in the Proposed Decision-making Process to Add a Sport model (Figure 1). The general sentiments are provided from one of participant's interviews:

> First of all, we had to get buy-in from the President. We did a pretty comprehensive presentation and the President was supportive of that. Then we

took it before our faculty athletic committee that is made up of faculty members from every college and they were supportive. Then we (presented to) the Women and Gender Advocacy Committee on campus, and then the University Budget Committee. We had all those conversations internally *(Interview #6, Women's Soccer, Large School).*

Theoretical Implications

Our study advances and adopts the Mintzberg et al. (1976) unstructured decision-making model for NCAA institution decision makers looking to add a sport. While we used the Mintzberg et al. (1976) phases as a foundation for our study, our data and adapted phases advance Mintzberg and colleagues work (1976). Doing so allows us to enhance the understanding of structured unstructured decision-making processes in the intercollegiate sport context.

Further, we also add to the understanding of the escalation of commitment and de-escalation of commitment work in sport by illustrating evidence that when leaders in athletic departments adhere to our model, they can potentially avoid the negative issues related to the escalation of commitment. Thus, our model inherently helps to highlight the importance of potential de-escalation exits throughout the decision-making process at each phase in the model. Namely, the acceptance interruption phase provides a pathway towards rejecting a potentially dangerous financial decision for athletic departments and universities.

Additionally, our model helped to modernize the longstanding escalation of commitment and entrapment (Brockner et al., 1986) that has been evident among intercollegiate sport decision-makers (Hutchinson & Bouchet, 2014b) by integrating each of the escalation of commitment determinants into one theoretical model. We found that the social determinant was responsible as a key driving force in our model, as noted earlier that community stakeholders not only proposed, but helped to support sport adoption initiatives. Next, we note how the organizational determinant was a key part of the justification aspect in our model. Specifically, our data show an emphasis on how this determinant aided the decision-makers' ability to gain buy-in from the community, specifically when there was a request to add a sport (Figure 1). Related to the organizational determinant's role in gaining buy-in from the community are the contextual and project determinants, which further emphasize the need to involve both internal and external stakeholders during the driving force and justification parts of our model while determining the exact impact the addition of a sport can have on the campus community. Our data specifically mention the addition of football to a university, and within our model's parts of driving force and justification, the agreement between internal stakeholders (i.e., athletic director and university officials) and external stakeholders (i.e., the surrounding community) was bolstered as the external stakeholders realized the potential positive economic gain the addition of football could result in for local businesses and individuals. Therefore, when the contextual and project determinants are working in sync with various driving forces, the justification aspect of our model is more easily reached and even further evident once decision-makers gain the acceptance portion of our

model. The final determinant – the psychological – dealt with how facts can at times be manipulated to make arriving at a desired decision easier and falsely justified. Our data illustrate, as does our model, how important feedback loops are throughout the entire decision-making process for adding a sport. Throughout each aspect of our model are arrows highlighting feedback avenues back to institutional administration, emphasizing keeping those higher-up leaders in the know as well as to guard against such manipulation of facts. Therefore, our model has integrated each of the five escalation of commitment determinants into Mintzberg et al.'s (1976) model to synthesize two important concepts related to adding an intercollegiate sport. We next detail the practical implications of our findings and model.

Practical Implications

Our findings and model can help athletic administrators currently, as many deliberate the potential to add or remove various sport teams against the backdrop of a potential COVID-19 related economic down turn. Already, the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively and significantly impacted the U.S. economy, including the financial outlook for universities (Weaver, 2020). The current unknown state of university athletic funding recently led decision-makers at the University of Cincinnati to eliminate their men's soccer team (Russo, 2020).

Current leaders in athletic departments can use our model to help guide their decision-making during COVID-19 in regards to adding or removing sports at their NCAA institutions. By adhering to our phases, we believe that athletic directors and administrators can potentially avoid an escalation of commitment scenario after the COVID-19 pandemic by ensuring all of our model's phases have been thoroughly vetted and approved. The inclusion of gaining buy-in from all levels in our acceptance interruption phase points to the importance of gathering the proper amount of internal and external stakeholder approval. During the potential economic downturn related to the 2020 pandemic, the feasibility studies performed during the evaluation phase also become more important with speculation of future sport seasons without fans and ticket revenues unknown.

Limitations and Future Research

We would be remiss not to mention certain limitations to our study. The first limitation is inherent to most qualitative research, particularly interview research with a relatively small sample size, and that is the lack of generalizability. Despite our sample size of 15 individuals representing a wide-variety of institutions and six conferences, we cannot say for certain that our findings would generalize to a wider population of similar participants across more institutions. Therefore, there may be differences in the decision-making process at the Division II and Division III NCAA levels. Our next limitation is that we do not have data prior to the 2008 recession on the decision-making processes within athletic departments with the same theoretical framework that we used. Therefore, we cannot say how the 2008 recession may have affected our model or how the model may have looked prior to 2008. While the limitations are noted, we do believe that future research can help address the limitations

in the following ways. First, a more robust data collection can be undertaken to capture more participants from institutions that were not captured in our current sample. Researchers would do well to use a social network approach to help aid a snowball sampling technique to gain more participants, and potentially be able to generalize findings to a wider audience. Second, while going back in time to interview intercollegiate athletic decision-makers before the 2008 recession is not possible, researchers can replicate our study under the current COVID-19 pandemic conditions. The pandemic conditions are economically similar (though not yet a recession at the time of this writing) to the 2008 recession (Weaver, 2020). We believe it would be interesting and valuable to further assess our model to interview current college athletic decision-makers as they go through the decision-making process to add or remove sport teams due to the pandemic. Several institutions have already gone through the process as evidenced by University of Cincinnati removing men's soccer, Old Dominion cutting wrestling, and conversely, Plymouth State adding men's swimming and Indiana Tech adding women's ice hockey (Russo, 2020).

Conclusion

COVID19 has changed the face of sports like no other time in history. Most sporting institutions are in the midst of reorganizing, restructuring, and in the coming years rebuilding. While there is a mass elimination of college sports, there are a number of institutions adopting new sports. Factors post COVID such as the economy emerging from a recession, and new collegiate realignments, will highlight the need for colleges to add sports. This is in addition to needs such as for enrollment, good publicity, and to return campuses to traditional normal social activities that students have come to know and expect from college life. Our model offers guidance for those intercollegiate athletic leaders who engage in the decision-making process of adding a sport in the coming years as institutions emerge from the COVID 19 pandemic and assess growth strategies in the future.

Overall, our study provides a deeper understanding to the decision-making processes related to adding an intercollegiate sport through a framework of unstructured structured decision-making and the escalation of commitment phenomenon. We found that when certain structures are evident, that college athletic decision-makers engaged in phases of driving force, justification, evaluation, acceptance, and authorization throughout the process. We form the phases into an adapted model of Mintzberg et al.'s (1976) work as a way to help practitioners through future decision-making processes of adding a sport as well as guiding future researchers by inviting further examination of our model.

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Fan Ties and Friendships: A Longitudinal Network Study of Division III Sports on Campus

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The purpose of this longitudinal actor-based network study is to examine the evolution of sport fan ties and friendship ties on Division III campuses. Using two years of network data from a cohort of new students at a Division III institution, a Simulation Investigation for Empirical Networks Analysis (SIENA) model is developed to empirically test the co-evolution of fan ties and friendship ties. Grounded in student development, sport consumer behavior, and network theories, the overarching goal of this study is to explore the causal effect of fan ties on friendship ties among new students. To ascertain the value of Division III sports on campus, the authors explore the role of sports on campus in promoting friendships for new students based on the strong theoretical tradition from student development highlighting the salience of peer relationships in student success and retention. Accordingly, theoretical implications related to sport fan networks are considered within practical discussion of Division III sports and retention.

Keywords: social network analysis, Division III athletics, longitudinal methods

Nearly 20% of students who enroll at higher education institutions (HEI) will not matriculate past their first year (McFarland et al., 2018). Raisman (2013) reported the average college loses just under $10 million due to student attrition, with publicly assisted colleges ($13.2 million) averaging greater losses than private colleges and universities ($8.3 million). Given that many colleges and universities are subsidized, at least to some extent, by the state or federal level, student retention and attrition are not merely issues for individual students. Schneider (2010), for example, estimated that state governments appropriated over $6 billion to college and university students who did not persist to their second year. Improving retention, therefore, is not only a matter of sustainability for colleges and universities, but also of public service to ensure financial stewardship on the part of HEIs.

In examining student attrition, both academic researchers and practitioner organizations have emphasized the role of peer relationships in persistence decisions. Astin (1999) asserted that a "student's peer group is the single most important influ-

ence of growth and development during the undergraduate years" (p. 398). InsideTrack (2018), an organization that works to reconnect college dropouts with HEIs, reported that 35% of traditionally aged students left college due to a lack of social community compared to the 11% who cited academics as the reason for departure. When Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) reviewed a decade's worth of research on educational attainment and persistence, they concluded that "peer influence is a statistically significant positive fore in students' persistence decisions" (p. 418). Though scholars have identified myriad other reasons for why students decide to leave higher education (Tinto, 2006), a student's ability to develop lasting and meaningful relationships with peers represents one of the most salient reasons they persist (Astin, 1999; Maunder, 2018; Swenson, Nordstrom, & Heister, 2008).

Based on the importance of peer relationships, mechanisms for promoting friendships among new students become part of an organizational strategy to enhance student retention and educational success. Sport management scholars have consistently noted the intersection between peer relationships and sport spectating (Katz & Heere, 2013; Lock & Funk, 2016). Consuming sport as a fan or spectator may provide opportunities for salubrious socialization and the development of relationships (Chalip. 2006). Similarly, sport fans report increased social support through sport spectatorship that affects the emotional well-being of attendees (Inoue, Sato, Filo, Du, & Funk, 2017). In other words, sport as a spectator activity might serve as a mechanism for promoting the types of relationships between students important to attainment and retention. Yet, there is no guarantee that sport will yield positive social results given that these outcomes are a function of how the sporting context is designed by sport managers and experienced by individual fans (Chalip, 2006; Guttman, 1986).

In the current study, we contribute to the literature by examining the causal effect of fan ties on friendships at the Division III level. Scholars have long examined the association between sports on campus and student outcomes. Yet a gap exists as to whether relationships formed through sport spectatorship on campus causes friendships among students. By using a longitudinal network approach, we examine causality on whether relationships embedded in Division III sport spectatorship lead to sustained friendships for students. Theoretically, we leverage student development, sport consumer behavior, and network theories to examine if Division III sports provide a context in which students create lasting and meaningful friendships through spectatorship. Division III sports is a particular sporting context that is largely void of commercial attention and direct revenue generation; yet such a sporting structure might create institutional value by building and maintaining peer relationships among new students. Using a longitudinal actor-based network study of new students at a Division III institution, the purpose of this study is to examine the evolution of sport fan ties and friendship ties for students on a Division III campus. Using two years of network data from a cohort of new students, we explore the causal effect of fan ties on friendship ties among new students to examine if and how Division III sports provide a context in which students create lasting and meaningful friendships through sport spectatorship.

Theoretical Frameworks

Student Development: Social Integration

The study of how new students adapt to their college environment has largely been framed within Tinto's (1975) landmark theory of departure. Tinto (1993) distinguished between formal and informal integration into the campus community, noting that both academic and social integration lead to greater likelihood of persistence for students. Extending this concept, Astin's (1999) theory of involvement connects student success to the human interaction, collaboration, and interpersonal connections between students and other members of the campus community (e.g., peers, faculty, staff). In both of these prominent theories, the emphasis is largely placed on the relationships that students form during their transition into the campus community. Theoretically, as students become more integrated in the classroom and involved with various activities or organizations on campus they connect with individuals in the campus community and increase the likelihood of both success and persistence – a notion that has received mixed support from a multitude of empirical studies (e.g., Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Webber, Krylow, & Zhang, 2014).

In addition to integration (Tinto, 1993) and involvement (Astin, 1999), scholars in student development have more recently adopted sense of belonging and attachment as theoretical frameworks related to student success (Strayhorn, 2012). Research in both attachment and sense of belonging shows that students' early experiences are influential throughout their time on campus. Strayhorn (2012) reported that early contacts impact sense of belonging to a larger degree if they involve relationships with peers whose background differs from one's own. Johnson et al. (2007), for instance, found smooth social transitions from high school to college significantly predicted feelings of belonging on campus. In their study, residence halls played an important role in forming early relationships. Likewise, Swenson and colleagues (2008) found that the type and quality of peer relationships students form impacted their academic, social, and emotional adjustment and led to greater levels of attachment to the institution. In addition, Maunder's (2018) findings showed that students who formed stronger relationships with their peers had stronger attachments to their institutions and were more likely to successfully adjust to college life.

For the purposes of this study, the underlying consensus from the works of Astin (1999), Tinto (1993), and Strayhorn (2012) is that relationships matter in understanding success in college, and that early experiences in the transition to campus are especially influential in determining the quality and type of relationships, and in forming attachment, involvement, and belonging for students that will impact the rest of their college career. Based on the conclusion that peer relationships enhance success for both student and organization, the next section of this article discusses network theory as a framework through which to examine student relationships on campus.

Network Theory: Student Relationships as Network Ties

The relationship between two individuals does not exist in isolation; individual actors are embedded in larger social systems comprised of individual actors and the ties

connecting them (Borgatti, Everett, & Johnson, 2013). Studying such social systems requires specific theoretical and methodological considerations – social network analysis. As Borgatti and Halgin (2011) noted, academic inquiries involving social network analysis have grown exponentially in recent years. In fields including health (Valente, 2010), leadership (Balkundi & Kilduff, 2006), management (Brass, Labianca, Mehra, Halgin, & Borgatti, 2014), and sport management (Quatman & Chelladurai 2008), relationships and their associated patterns continue to predict and explain a wide array of individual- and group-level outcomes. Grounded in the assumption that both relationships and structure matter, the network approach provides a framework for incorporating and appreciating the interdependencies of social behavior (Prell, 2012). Network theory, according to Borgatti and Halgin (2011), involves the consequences of network variables and the ways in which network properties relate to some predefined outcome of interest.

Several scholars have examined social integration through network approaches. McEwan (2013), for example, emphasized how social integration involved more than individual relationships, illustrating the benefits of studying retention through a network lens. Through a network study of new students at a larger southwestern university, McEwan (2013) found that a new student's satisfaction with their social networks was related to institutional commitment. It was not merely the number of ties a student had, but satisfaction with the larger network of ties suggesting the importance of networks in persistence. Similarly, Thomas (2000) emphasized the need for examining Tinto's (1993) social integration through a network approach. In a study of freshman at a small liberal arts college, Thomas (2000) found that structural characteristics of a student's social network influence both academic performance and persistence intentions. Rather than examining student relationships as isolated relationships, McEwan (2013) and Thomas (2000) illustrated the importance of incorporating network theories and methodologies to study peer relationships and persistence behavior.

Whereas traditional social science research methods predict some individual outcomes based on other characteristics of the individual, the network approach utilizes the individual's social environment in addition to other individual characteristics to explain and predict outcome variables (Borgatti & Foster, 2003). Such relational characteristics need to be included because one's position in a network, in part, determines many of the constraints and opportunities an individual will encounter (Borgatti et al., 2013). As Marin and Wellman (2014) argued, individual behaviors and attitudes generally are not located only in individual attributes, but in the social structure within which individuals are embedded. Understanding relationships between two actors requires such a network approach. The relationship in a network is conceptualized as a tie, and it is the tie that gives rise to a corresponding network (Borgatti et al., 2013). Actors are simultaneously embedded in a variety of networks (i.e., friendships, colleagues, family members), and these different networks may impact each other. A new student's friendship network, for example, could theoretically be affected and impacted by the evolution of a student's other relational networks – including a sport fan network.

Sport Consumer Behavior: Fan Networks and Sports on Campus

For new students on campus, intercollegiate athletics may play a prominent role in the development of interpersonal relationships. Sport scholars have consistently noted the prevalence of personal relationships in the initial socialization of sport fans (James, 2001). It is often interpersonal relationships that help new fans navigate the unique challenges of developing identification with a focal team (Lock, Taylor, Funk, & Darcy, 2012). As new students begin their onboarding and socialization into campus culture, their emerging friendships are intrinsically linked with other burgeoning relational ties as well (i.e., roommate, classmate). Could watching sports together be similarly linked with the evolution of friendship ties? Sport scholars discuss the relations between individual fans, and how fan-to-fan interactions create valuable experiences for individuals (Uhrich, 2014). Rather than conceptualizing a crowd at a game as some monolithic entity, crowds of fans are more representative of an aggregation of individual actors interacting with other actors (Katz & Heere, 2013). In other words, a crowd or fan base is a network of individual fans connected by varying ties and relations.

The notion of "sport fan communities" has garnered increased attention by sport management research (e.g., Asada & Ko, 2019; Yoshida, Heere, & Gordon, 2015). Within these communities, individual fans are influenced by both a psychological sense of community and individual relationships with other members (Katz, Ward, & Heere, 2018). Specifically, on college campuses, sport scholars have studied how a student's psychological connection to a sports team affects their corresponding sentiments towards the university. Research by Wann and Robinson (2002), Clopton (2008), Clopton and Finch (2008), Warner, Shapiro, Dixon, Ridinger, and Harrison (2011), Heere and Katz (2014), Katz and Heere (2016), and Stensland, Taniyev, Scola, Ishaq, Wilkerson, and Gordon (2019) has together formed a somewhat cohesive narrative, finding moderate to strong evidence for the relationship between fandom and sentiment towards the institution of higher learning. Specifically, Katz and Clopton (2014) found that identification with Division III athletic teams contributed to students' increased identification with the surrounding community. Katz, Dixon, Heere, and Bass (2017) also examined the Division III setting, suggesting Division III athletics serve as a "front porch" for new students. More specifically, they found that growth trajectories of team identification significantly affected changes in university identification. In other words, how new students identified with the sports teams on campus had a causal effect on how students identified with the larger university.

As scholars show that psychologically connecting with sports on campus impacts sentiments towards the larger university, we might hypothesize that psychological connections impact persistence decisions as well. But a psychological connection is not equivalent to peer relationships. As scholars like Astin (1999), Tinto (1993), and Strayhorn (2012) have emphasized, peer relationships play the most important role in retention and persistence. Such peer relationships are the strongest and most consistently validated indicator of success and retention in college (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). And though linking Division III sports on campus with

other indicators of psychological attachment (e.g., university identity) is a great start to understanding the role of sport on theses campuses, the value of Division III sports is best examined through its effect on interpersonal relationships. We aim to address this gap; to test whether sport fan ties cause interpersonal relationships among new students. The capacity for sport at this level to provide a platform to foster and maintain peer relationships for general students (not just athletes) enhances the institutional value of sponsoring Division III athletics.

The Evolution of Ties: Longitudinal Social Network Analysis

Peer relationships are not static constructs; relationships are formed, maintained, and potentially dissolved during the course of a student's time on campus. Studying the impact of sport fan ties and peer relationships thus requires a longitudinal lens. Network scholars have developed a series of longitudinal network modeling methods to examine the evolution of networks, including stochastic actor oriented modeling (SAOM) techniques and yet these approaches are largely absent from sport management research. Social networks are inherently dynamic given that individuals create, endure, and potentially dissolve different ties over time (Snijders, van den Bunt, & Steglich, 2010). Both individual ties and the resulting network structure can change substantially in both the short- and long-term, and network scholars have increasingly utilized actor-based longitudinal modeling to examine network evolution (Prell, 2012). In fact, to study network influence or the co-evolution or multiple ties, longitudinal methods are necessary to model how network change occurs (Borgatti et al., 2013).

To guide the present study, we specifically utilize SAOM to highlight the actor-based perspective whereby it is assumed that individual actors control their own actions. That is, each individual in a network is thought to evaluate their own relations with others and strive to optimize their own social situations (Prell, 2012). In this way, SAOMs assume that actors control their outgoing ties and have agency over to whom they send interpersonal ties (Snijders et al., 2010). For the case of friendships and sport fan ties, these underlying assumptions are satisfied as individual students control with whom they report being friends and attending sporting events. Moreover, SAOMs incorporate the changes individual actors make over time, examining the stochastic dependence between the creation, continuation, and potential termination of network ties (Snijders et al., 2010). Developing SAOM models involves identifying particular structural effects (i.e., transitivity), control variables (i.e., gender), and dyadic network effects to include in the models. In the following section, we outline the specific hypotheses appropriate for a SAOM approach to studying the evolution of sport fan ties and friendship ties on Division III campuses.

Hypothesis Development: Structural Effects

Within SAOMs, structural effects refer to endogenously determined effects, such as they are a function of current network characteristics (Snijders et al., 2010). The most basic structural effects involve centrality, one of the most prominent and popular constructs used in social network analysis. Centrality refers to a family of con-

cepts that, in an aggregate sense, refer to the structural importance of each individual actor within a network (Borgatti et al., 2013). From the perspective of the individual node, centrality is conceptualized as the benefits and advantages an individual receives due specifically to their position in the network. In SAOMs, we must differentiate between indegree centrality and outdegree centrality. Indegree centrality is the number of ties received by an actor from others, whereas outdegree centrality is the number of ties given by an actor to others in the network (Borgatti et al., 2013; Prell, 2012). Outdegree centrality is the most basic effect and represents the tendency for individuals to have ties at all, described as the likelihood that actor *i* sends ties to alter *j,* where *j* has no specific structural or attributional characteristic that makes them more attractive. Our first hypothesis utilizes the outdegree effect for both the fan (H1a) and friendship (H1b) networks, both of which should yield negative estimates. Indegree centrality is viewed as a measure of popularity, where actor *i* received more ties from others in the network than the average actor. Indegree centrality is often examined through popularity effects, whereby those actors with higher incoming ties are more likely to attract more incoming ties in future waves of data collection. A positive indegree popularity implies fans with high indegree reinforce themselves, which will yield a high dispersion of indegree ties among network members. Our second hypothesis (H2) utilizes the indegree-popularity effect for the fan network.

Beyond centrality, the next structural effect hypothesized involves reciprocity. Reciprocity represents an important network effect in directed networks, whereby actor *i* is likely to return a tie with actor *j*, if actor *j* sends a tie to actor *i*. Reciprocation is common in directed networks, because reciprocation and exchange are fundamental components to social behavior (Robins, 2015). In fact, Borgatti et al. (2013) suggested including reciprocity in all SAOMs because of inherent social tendencies towards reciprocal relationships. In understanding fan ties, reciprocity measures whether two individuals both report sharing a fan tie with the other. Intuitively, reciprocity should be inherent to fan ties because both individuals participate in attending the event or communicating about a particular team. Reported ties, however, are influenced by the perception of the actor; whether an individual remembers a tie or deems the experience as noteworthy enough to report illustrates the inherent value of the tie. In other words, there is no guarantee that actor *i* and actor *j* will both remember and report a sport fan tie, even if co-attendance or communication took place. The inclusion of reciprocity is designed to test the meaningfulness and importance of the fan tie to both actors in the exchange. Our third hypothesis utilizes the reciprocity effect for both fan ties (H3a) and friendship (H3b) ties.

The final set of structural effects include transitivity. Transitivity is an essential feature of most social networks, whereby friends of friends become friends (Borgatti et al., 2013; Snijders et al., 2010). Triads are often conceptualized as the building blocks of larger networks (Prell, 2012; Robins, 2015) and much can be learned about network structure by examining transitivity within the network. In the present study, we not only test for the existence of the transitivity effect but also how transitivity occurs by including effects for transitive triplets and three-cycles. Transitive triplets refer to situations where actor *i* sends a tie to alter *j*, *j* sends a tie to *h,* and thus *i* will

send a tie to *h* and close the triad. The closed triad is highly dependent on a single node, *h*, as the single node receives two ties within the triad, and one node, *i,* receives no incoming ties, indicating the presence of hierarchical ordering (Robins, 2015; Snijders et al., 2010).

Hierarchical ordering in triads represents the influence of hubs at the local level, where even at the smallest levels of network structure actors depend on a subset of the population. A different way to interpret transitivity, the three cycle effects, refers to situations where each actor sends and receives exactly one tie; actor *i* sends a tie to alter *j, j* sends a tie to alter *h,* and consequently *h* will send a tie back to *i.* Such a triad represents the absence of hierarchical cluster and the presence of closure through a more generalized exchange (Snijders et al., 2010). Three cycles can also be regarded as generalized reciprocity within triadic closures (Ripley, Snijders, Boda, Voros, & Preciado, 2019). Our fourth hypothesis (H4) utilizes the transitive triplets effect for fan ties and the fifth hypothesis (H5) uses the three-cycle effect for fan ties, which should yield a negative estimate.

Hypothesis Development: Covariate Effects

The structural effects above are conceptualized as endogenously determined effects, such that they are a function of the network characteristics. Conversely, covariate effects (i.e., individual behaviors or attributes) are conceptualized exogenously in that they are a characteristic of the individual nodes. Within SAOMs, covariate effects can occur in three ways (Snijders et al., 2010). First, the ego effect measures whether a focal actor with some attribute tends to have higher outdegree measures. Second, the alter effect measures whether actors with some attribute receive higher indegree ties. And third, the similarity effect measures whether ties occur more often between actors who share similar values on the attribute of interest.

The similarity effect is grounded in homophily, one of the oldest and most frequently replicated findings in all of social psychology (Borgatti et al., 2013). It refers to the tendency for individuals to have positive ties to individuals who are similar to themselves in significant attributes or characteristics (Prell, 2012). In the present study, we utilize team identification as the characteristic of interest within the covariate effects. Team identification is perhaps the most widely studied construct in all of sport management (James, Delia, & Wann, 2019), as scores of scholars have examined the relationship between an individual's team identification with consumption behaviors such as attendance and media consumption (Lock & Heere, 2017). Consistent with Lock and Heere's (2017) analysis of team identification, we conceptualize team identification as the part of an individual's self-concept derived from their membership in a social group (sport team) with the value and emotional significance of belonging to such group, a definition consistent with Tajfel's (1982) operationalization of social identity. As the most prominent construct within sport marketing and sport consumer behavior, we hypothesize that alters with higher levels of team identification will attract more incoming ties in the fan network (H6a) and friend network (H6b); that individuals with higher levels of team identification will send more outgoing ties in the fan network (H7a) and friend network (H7b); and

that individuals send more ties to alters with similar team identification values in both the fan network (H8a) and friend network (H8b).

Hypothesis Development: Dyadic Effects

The final classification of effects involves dyadic effects, or between-network co-evolution. Our second stated purpose in this research is to examine the evolution of sport fan ties and friendship ties on Division III campuses. The co-evolution of two networks occurs through modeling the dyadic effects of fan ties with friendship ties. Given the longitudinal nature of the study, dyadic effects are able to approximate directionality and causality; topics that cross-sectional designs do not examine. To examine the effect of fan ties on friendship ties, we included two different dyadic effects. First, we included a Main Effect of fan ties on friendship ties, whereby actors *i* and *j* attending a sporting event together lead to a friendship tie. The Main Effect incorporates causality, examining whether a fan tie leads to the formation of a friendship tie, our ninth hypothesis (H9). Additionally, we also tested a dyadic effect regarding indegree popularity. Within dyadic effects, indegree popularity refers to situations whereby actors with high indegree in the first network, also attract more indegree ties in the second network. For the tenth (H10) and final hypothesis, we examine whether actors with high fan ties indegree will attract greater incoming friendship ties as a result. Again, the indegree popularity dyadic effect is an approximation of causality, whereby greater indegree ties in the fan network lead to greater indegree ties in the friendship networks.

Method

Participants and Procedure

The sample for this longitudinal actor-based network study consisted of a freshman orientation group at a small, private institution in the southwestern United States. To protect the anonymity of the research setting and participants, the specific Division III institution will be referred to as South College. South College has participated in Division III athletics for several decades and is largely representative of the 'typical' Division III institution. According to the NCAA (2018), the average Division III institution has 2,758 undergraduate students, sponsors 18 sports, spends $4.2 million annually on athletics, and student athletes comprise 26% of the student body population. South College enrolls approximately 2,300 undergraduate students, sponsors 15 sports (including football), and reports an annual athletics budget of $4.3 million. Additionally, student-athletes comprise about 25% of the student population. Based on these characteristics, South College was deemed an appropriate research setting largely indicative of the 'typical' Division III institution. It is also worth noting that South College considers itself academically selective and often finishes in the upper echelon of the Directors' Cup, an annual program recognizing broad-based athletic success based on team performances, indicative of a successful Division III athletics program in terms of performance.

The specific students from South College invited to participate in this study were all members of a freshman orientation group. After initial discussions with administrators at South College, campus leaders recommended utilizing an orientation group as the sample population. This particular orientation group consisted of 15 new students who experienced the institution's orientation program together and were placed in the same dormitory during their first year on campus. The group was not formed on the basis of any shared characteristic – not a similar major, demographic characteristic, or extracurricular activity – as the university "randomly" created the orientation group. The sample group contained 15 new students who were all recruited to participate in the study during their first few weeks on campus. Two potential participants declined to participate, and as a result the study began with 13 members of the orientation group, representing 87% of the orientation group. The average age of the participants was 18 years old and each student was in their first semester on campus. A slight majority of the participants identified as female (n = 8, 61.5%) which is largely representative of the broader university population as indicated by the campus leaders.

SAOMs require a minimum of two, but preferably more, repeated observations among actors of the same network (Snijders et al., 2010). To collect our network panel data, we designed a data collection procedure to take place over the course of four semesters; the first four semesters of our participants' tenure at South College. For four consecutive semesters, with two weeks remaining in the semester, participants received an email from the lead researcher with a direct link to an electronic survey. Each participant had previously agreed to participate in the study and was consequently aware of when, and from whom, the survey invitation would arrive. A second reminder was distributed to non-respondents approximately two days after the initial request. Because network studies demand high response rates, a small incentive (i.e., free pizza) was provided to ensure participants completed each round of the survey. All 13 participants completed the network questionnaire in each round of the study.

Instrumentation

The electronic survey for this study contained measures designed to capture both network ties and individual attributional data. For the network measures, we utilized a roster-based approach aimed at ensuring accuracy and recall (Prell, 2012). In a roster-based approach, participants are given a list of all members of the network population and asked to answer particular relational questions regarding that individual. Roster-based approaches are less susceptible to recall bias and are generally considered the most reliable form of data collection when a network boundary is easily identified (Borgatti et al., 2013). The roster remained the same across all four waves of data collection.

The Network Questionnaire. First, participants were asked to indicate whether they considered each name listed as a personal friend. There was no predetermined minimum or maximum number of friends each participant could select. Next, using

the same roster, participants were asked to indicate whether they had attended a sport event on campus with each member of the network. The brief instruction explained the "fan tie" question involved any varsity sport sponsored by their university and included in-person attendance at the event. The minimum or maximum number of names was determined individually by each participant.

Team Identification. In addition to network questions, participants were asked to complete a modified version of Heere and James' (2007) Team*ID scale. The Team*ID scale is multidimensional and grounded in Social Identity Theory. Based on Lock and Heere's (2017) review of measuring team identification, the Team*ID scale is considered theoretically legitimate for our purposes and has been used many times in the study of college students as sport fans (Heere & Katz, 2014; Katz et al., 2017). The Team*ID scale consists of six dimensions of social identity, with individual items measured with Seven-Point Likert Scales: 1) Private evaluation (e.g., I feel good about being a fan of South College athletics); 2) Public evaluation (e.g., In general, others respect South College athletics); 3) Interconnection of self (e.g., When someone criticizes South College athletics, it feels like a personal insult); 4) Sense of interdependence (e.g., What happens to South College athletics will influence what happens in my own life); 5) Behavioral involvement (e.g., I participate in activities supporting South College athletics); and 6) Cognitive awareness (e.g., I am aware of the tradition and history of South College athletics).

The Team*ID scale was distributed with the network questionnaire during each wave of data collection. While all participants completed the network questionnaire at each wave, we had a few instances of missing data in terms of team identification: one missing during the second wave; four missing during the third wave; and one missing during the fourth wave of data collection. Missing data is a common issue that researchers have to deal with (McKnight, McKnight, Sidani, & Figueredo, 2007). The statistical technique that has received the most praise from scholars in handling missing data is Multiple Imputation (MI) (Allison, 2002; Rubin, 2004; Schafer & Graham, 2002). Through multiple imputations, for each missing datum, three to 10 values are estimated and imputed based on the available data. For each set of imputed values, the researcher obtains a complete dataset. We performed the MI procedure five times on our dataset, which is an acceptable number of iterations (McKnight et al., 2007). We then averaged the five completed datasets to arrive at our final Team ID covariates.

Data Analysis

After four waves of data collection over the course of two academic years, our final data contained actor-based network data regarding fan ties, friendship ties, and team identification as a covariate at each wave. Using these data, we began developing the SAOMs. In order to examine the evolution of the fan ties network and the co-evolution of fan ties and friendship ties, we used the Simulation Investigation for Empirical Network Analysis (SIENA), a specific type of SAOM modeling technique. SIENA is a statistical approach that allows for the examination of longitudi-

nal network data with two more observations. A defining feature of SIENA is the consideration of change in a network from the perspective of the actors, consistent with the actor-based approach. SIENA views change in a network as determined by a series of micro steps made by individual actors to create, maintain, or dissolve ties in a network. These micro steps are not observed by the researchers but are modeled by the algorithm in a series of network simulations. Researchers can use SIENA to define models with effects that they think influence the evolution of a network, and then test whether these effects are significant in impacting the dynamic evolution of the network (Snijders et al., 2010).

Using multiple waves of network panel data, SIENA views the network ties as the results of decisions made by each individual actor. SIENA is considered an actor-based approach because each actor controls their outgoing ties; each change in a network tie is thus conceptualized as the result of choices made by individual actors. To use SIENA, a dataset and modeling technique must meet four model assumptions (Snijders et al., 2010). First, the 'time' parameter must be continuous and unfold in steps of a certain length. Second, network changes are the outcome of Markov processes where, for each point in time, the current state of the network determines probabilistically later evolutions of the network. This assumption requires a meaningful independent variable to individual actors and incorporates any meaningful information from the past. Third, actors control, and have the ability to change, their own outgoing ties during subsequent waves of data. And finally, the fourth assumption of SIENA states that each actor gets the opportunity to change one outgoing tie at any moment without requiring coordination of other ties. As long as ties can change one by one, the fourth assumption is satisfied (Snijders et al., 2010). Based on our interpretation of these four assumptions, our dataset and analytical strategy align with SIENA, specifically the SIENA packing in R (RSIENA; Ripley, Snijders, Boda, Voros, & Preciado, 2019).

SIENA models include two kinds of parameters: rate parameters and objective function parameters. Rate parameters refer to the tendency of individual actors to change their ties with others in the network. Objective function parameters measure the probability that a tie is created, maintained, or eliminated following a certain pattern. That is, objective functions test whether a particular network's structural tendency (i.e., transitivity), individual attributes or covariates (i.e., gender), or the impact of other networks through co-evolution (i.e., friendship and fan ties) significantly affect the probability of tie creation, maintenance, or elimination. Objective functions are tested using t-statistics, defined as the estimate divided by the standard error.

For our particular SIENA model, we included several parameters with corresponding explanations and graphical representations included in Table 1. To examine the evolution of the fan ties networks, outdegree (density) and reciprocity were first included followed by indegree popularity, transitive triplets, and three cycle objective functions. As covariates in the fan tie network, team identification was included at each level of potential covariate effect: ego, alter, and similarity. In addition to the fan ties model, we also utilized SIENA's ability to test multiplex network parame-

Table 1
Explanation of Model Effects

Effect used	***Description***
Structural effects	
Outdegree (density)	Actor *i* sends ties to alter *j*.
Reciprocity	Actor i reciprocates ties with alter j.
Transitive triplets	Actor *i* sends ties to alter *j, j* sends ties to *h,* so *i* is likely to send ties to *h*.
Three cycles	Actor *i* sends ties to alter *j, j* sends ties to *h,* so *h* is likely to send ties to *i*.
Indegree-popularity	Actors with many incoming ties attract more incoming ties.
Covariate (Team ID) effects	
Team ID alter	Actor *i* with higher values of Team ID attracts more incoming ties.
Team ID ego	Actor *i* with higher values of Team ID sends more outgoing ties.
Team ID similarity	Actor *i* sends ties to alter *j* who has similar values of Team ID.
Between-network dyadic effects	
Main effect of Sport Fan Tie network on Friendship network	For actors *i* and *j*, attending sporting events together on campus leads to relationship or friendship.
Sport Fan Tie indegree on Friendship popularity	Actors that attend sporting events with many alters, also attract more friendship ties.

ters, or the effects of relations in one network on relationships in another network (Snijders, Lomi, & Torlo, 2013). To examine the co-evolution of friendship ties, we first included both outdegree (density) and reciprocity for friendship ties, which are both included by default in RSIENA functions. We also tested team identification at each level of potential covariate effect within the friendship network. Finally, to examine whether fan ties create friendships among new students, we included a 'Main Effect' parameter for the effect of a fan tie on friendship ties. We also tested whether popularity in the sport ties network leads to popularity in the friendship network as a secondary measure of the effect of fan ties on friendship ties.

Results

The SIENA models created in this study were designed to explore the evolution of sport fan networks and examine how fan ties affect friendship ties for new students at a Division III institution. Full results of the models can be found in Table 2, which includes rate parameters, structural effects, covariate effects, and co-evolution

effects for both fan ties network and friendship network. The overall model reported a convergence ratio of 0.1917, which suggests the RSIENA algorithm converged appropriately as it falls below the 0.25 threshold suggested by Ripley et al. (2009) as an indicator of fit. The rate parameters for the fan ties networks indicates that fan tie evolution peaked during the first time period, and largely slowed during the final wave. The rate parameters for the friendship networks were much smaller and more constant, suggesting more consistent changes to friendships than fan ties. It is worth noting here that rate parameters are not significant, which is consistent with RSIENA expectations as a significant result would suggest they are equal to zero (Borgatti et al., 2013).

Based on the structural effects for the sport fan network, the SIENA model yielded significant results for outdegree (density), reciprocity, transitive triplets, and three-cycles; indegree-popularity was non-significant. In terms of our stated hypotheses, we found support for H1a, a basic tendency for individuals to send ties at all. The negative estimate indicates that actors are not likely to send fan ties to an arbitrary actor without any attractive structural and attributional characteristics. Because indegree-popularity reported a non-significant effect, H2 was not supported. H3a was supported through a positive and significant effect of reciprocity, suggesting shared fan ties were reported by both actors. Examining the transitivity results, the significant positive estimate for transitive triples combined with a negative significant effect for three-cycles strongly supports H4 – the presence of a transitivity with hierarchical closure. Accordingly, H5 was not supported based on the negative effect of three-cycles. The covariate effects based on team identification were not significant at the ego, alter, or similarity levels, providing no support for H6a, H7a, and H8a.

Moving to the friendship network, both outdegree (density) and reciprocity were statistically significant. Outdegree was negative, suggesting that friendships with arbitrary network members were more likely not to occur, supporting H1b. Reciprocity was positive, indicating friendships followed basic tendency of reciprocal relationships and supporting H3b. The covariate effects of team identification were not significant at the ego, alter, or similarity level, providing no support for H6b, H7b, and H8b.

Finally, examining the dyadic network effects of fan ties on friendship ties, the main effect was not significant while the indegree popularity effect was significant. The non-significant estimate for the main effect rejects H9, finding no statistical support for fan ties leading to friendship ties. To reiterate, a non-significant main effect suggests that two actors attending a game together does not necessarily lead to a friendship tie developing. The indegree popularity effect, however, was positive and significant, supporting H10. Actors with high fan tie indegree do attract greater incoming friendship ties; indegree popularity in the fan network leads to indegree popularity in the friendship network.

Table 2
Results of SIENA Model

Hypothesis		Estimate	Standard Error	Convergence t-ratio	Sign.
Rate parameters (Sport Fan Ties network)					
---	Rate parameter period 1	12.5852	11.1558	-0.02	
---	Rate parameter period 2	8.0772	3.656	-0.0782	
---	Rate parameter period 3	3.3361	1.0278	-0.0827	
Structural effects (Sport Fan Ties network)					
H1a	Outdegree (density)	-1.6046	0.3558	0.0371	**
H2	Indegree - popularity	-0.2081	0.1137	0.027	
H3a	Reciprocity	1.7992	0.4807	0.0661	**
H4	Transitive triplets	0.6868	0.1414	0.0417	**
H5	Three-cycles	-0.7424	0.2613	0.0495	**
Covariate Effects (Sport Fan Ties network)					
H6a	Team ID alter	0.1199	0.1292	0.0145	
H7a	Team ID ego	0.1266	0.1391	0.0009	
H8a	Team ID similarity	0.3018	0.4796	0.0256	
Rate parameters (Friendship network)					
---	Rate parameter period 1	3.8924	1.0448	-0.0616	
---	Rate parameter period 2	4.9664	1.4687	-0.0115	
---	Rate parameter period 3	4.2353	1.296	0.0429	
Structural effects (Friendship network)					
H1b	Outdegree (density)	-1.5776	0.2623	0.0422	**
H3b	Reciprocity	2.1969	0.3634	0.0513	**
Covariate Effects (Friendship network)					
H6b	Team ID alter	-0.1612	0.1535	-0.0158	
H7b	Team ID ego	-0.0066	0.143	-0.0045	
H8b	Team ID similarity	0.8295	0.4981	-0.0145	
Dyadic network effects (Sport Fan Ties network effect on the Friendship network)					
H9	Main effect of Sport Consumption network on Friendship network	0.8161	0.7295	0.091	
H10	Sport Consumption popularity effect on Friendship popularity	0.7511	0.3783	0.0345	*

Overall maximum convergence ratio: 0.1917
*p<0.05
** p<0.01

Discussion

Our purpose for this research was to explore the evolution of sport fan networks and examine how fan ties affect friendship ties among new students at a Division III institution. In examining the fan and friendship network, we aimed to contribute to both the sport consumer behavior and student development literatures by highlighting the relationship between fan ties and friendships. Grounded in the importance of social integration (Tinto, 1993) and peer relationships (Astin, 1999) with respect to persistence and retention, we begin our discussion of the SIENA model results of the dyadic effects examining the co-evolution of fan and friendship ties. The non-significant dyadic network effects of fan ties on friendships ties indicates that attending games together does not necessarily lead to the formation of friendships. In other words, attending games together did not cause friendship to form. Such a finding is somewhat divergent from previous research using psychological measures as proxies for social integration (i.e., Clopton, 2008; Katz et al., 2018), which consistently link measures of sport consumption (i.e., team identity) with proxy measures for social integration (i.e., university identity). The development of fan ties did not significantly affect the formation of relationships for the new students in this study. Only one participant in the study reported never attending a game with someone else in the group, yet these co-attendance events did not significantly affect friendship ties.

Though fan ties might not cause friendship ties, the significance of the indegree popularity effects suggests fan ties and social integration are related. As individual actors receive more incoming ties in the fan network they are more likely to then receive incoming ties in the friendship network. These ties might not come from the same actor. If the same actor sending a fan tie caused a friendship tie, the dyadic network effect would have been significant. Based on this finding, however, incoming ties in the fan network seem to cause other actors to send friendship ties moving forward. Thomas (2000) and McEwan (2013) both linked new students finding peer relationships to persistence decisions. The indegree popularity effect provides support for sport spectatorship yielding incoming friendship ties. Attending sporting events on campus together might not cause friendships with the same actor, but popularity in the fan networks signals to others the value of one's role in the friendship network as well. Peer relationships are particularly important for new students early in their transition to campus (Strom & Savage, 2014); for the participants in this study, attending sporting events together led to receiving more friendship ties moving forward and, consequently, greater social integration.

Receiving sport fan ties appears to be a successful strategy for positioning oneself to receive future friendships.

Though the indegree popularity effect was significant between the fan and friend networks, the fan network itself was not marked by an indegree popularity effect. Becoming more popular within the fan network did not lead to greater future fan ties; whatever signaling occurred between attending sport events and future friendships, the same did not occur within the fan network. Both the fan and friendship networks

were marked by reciprocity, consistent with other network studies of directed networks, generally, and friendships specifically (Borgatti et al., 2013; Robins, 2015). Given the presence of reciprocal effects, the meaningfulness and impact of both the fan ties and friendship ties appear largely even on both sides of the relationships. This intuitively makes sense since it takes two people to attend a game together. Yet, a significant reciprocal effect reinforces that 'co-consumption' approach of sport consumer behavior. A growing line of researchers have emphasized how fans co-create value through their interactions (Uhrich, 2014; Woratschek, Horbel, & Popp, 2014), and the reciprocal nature of fan ties illustrates such co-creation.

The presence of transitivity also suggests a network foundation to co-creation of value among sport spectators. The presence of hierarchical closure (i.e., transitive triplets), rather than generalized reciprocity (i.e., three cycles), illustrates that fan networks are influenced by a localized hierarchy. Put another way, a social hierarchy exists within the transitivity of the fan network suggesting the influence of key nodes or actors in the network. Rather than a generalized reciprocity where ties are evenly distributed, the transitive nature of the network is marked by hierarchical closure where select nodes are largely responsible for connecting various actors (Ripley et al., 2019). Such a finding is consistent with Katz and Heere's (2013) work on network 'leaders' and scale-free networks. Of note, however, is that these network leaders do not necessarily increase their status over time. Being popular in the fan network does not lead to greater incoming ties moving forward, illustrated by the lack of an indegree popularity effect. Network leaders begin as central actors, and over the course of this study the leaders in the fan network largely remained consistent in their hierarchical role.

The lack of significant effects based on team identification as a covariate was a surprising finding, particularly in the fan tie network. Homophily is a fairly standard and often-replicated finding within network studies, as individuals tend to create relationships with actors who are similar to themselves (Prell, 2011). The premise of the covariate effects was based on homophily (i.e., fan ties would occur based on shared similarities of team identification). Surprisingly, this was simply not the case for the 13 participants in this study, as there was no significant support for the similarity effect based on team identification.

Moreover, we were also surprised that team identification as a covariate was not significant at either the ego or alter effect level. Given the popularity of team identification research in sport management (James et al., 2019; Lock & Heere, 2017), we expected individuals with higher levels of team identification to play a more focal role in the fan tie network, either through creating more outgoing fan ties or eliciting more incoming fan ties. Nevertheless, team identification did not significantly affect incoming ties nor outgoing ties for the participants in this study. It is challenging to explain why non-significant results occurred in our model, but perhaps the 'leaders' of fan networks are not leaders based a heightened identity with the team. In other words, perhaps leadership in fan networks is based on some other individual attribute (i.e., gender, personality traits) beyond team identity. Katz, Baker, and Hui (2020) found a similar result in their study of a soccer supporters club, showing how the

most passionate (i.e., highly identified) were not the most influential in the network. Based on the results of the current study, we similarly propose that team identity does not inherently equal network influence; sport fan ties or sport fan network centrality is not synonymous with levels of team identity. As sport scholars continue to utilize group marketing frameworks, whether they be network-based or not, the most identified consumers may not play the largest role in influencing the rest of the group.

We also found no evidence for team identification effects for friendship ties, either at the ego, alter, or similarity level. Team identification did not play a role in the development of friendship ties, providing no evidence of homophilous friendship ties based on team identification for the participants in this study. Future scholars might consider what attributes, beyond team identification, impact the creation, continuation, and potential termination of sport fan ties.

Practical Implications

Beyond the theoretical implications of the current research, there are a number of practical implications based on the results of our longitudinal actor-based network study. First, to maximize the value of Division III athletics on campus, campus leaders could use sport early to assist in the development of new friendships for incoming students. Though attending games together did not significantly predict developing a friendship, those individuals attending with many others were more likely to elicit friendships moving forward. Accordingly, attending sporting events on a Division III campus can be viewed as a cause of social integration; attendance is not merely for the experience of consuming sport but a vehicle to generate popularity in friendship networks. Attendance at Division III sporting events often has few of the traditional barriers of commercialized sport; games are largely free, frequent, and located near student housing. Such ingredients fashion a situation conducive to salubrious socialization, particularly when social spaces are available surrounding the actual sport event. Making attendance ties visible and providing opportunities for new students to leverage fan ties into friendships may be the optimal outcome for sponsoring Division III sports.

Based on average attendance data for most Division III institutions, the spectator experience is far different at South College than "big-time" NCAA institutions. When a student is surrounding by 100,000 others at a University of Texas or Texas A&M football game, the size of the crowd may be overwhelming and unconducive to affecting friendship ties later in ones' campus integration experience. With smaller crowds, less commercialized activities, and dampened cultural expectations to attend, attendance may signal something to other students who created friendship ties moving forward. The atmosphere at Division III events may characterize an environment more conducive for formulating interpersonal relationships. Incentivizing and encouraging new students to attend sporting events with other new students has value not only for the individual student, but for the institution at large as well.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Though the results of this study are insightful, the specific research setting limits the generalizability of the findings. This represents both the opportunity and challenge

for studying the role of college sports on campus: every campus is different. Hopefully this study serves as a starting point to better understand not only how college sport impacts the social fabric of campus, but also what characteristics of college athletics maximize (or minimize) that potential impact. Is football important? Does winning matter? In terms of impacting campus, is there a relationship between enrollment and the level of competition needed? Scholars should continue examining not only the theoretical relationship between sport and different institutional outcomes, but also the characteristics of the sporting structure that best elicit positive organizational and individual outcomes.

Additionally, some of the methodological decisions in this study are worth noting as potential limitations. Namely, measuring both friendships and consumption ties through binary yes/no answers may oversimplify the nature of these relationships. Had participants been given a chance to weigh their answers, perhaps indicating the degree of one's friendships or providing the number of events co-attended, that may have provided more variance in the network. Next, the only ties included in this study were friendship and consumption of sport. There are, undoubtedly, many other relationships that underlie the college experience. This study did not measure if students studied together, ate together, went on vacation together or any other type of relationship. Future research may want to include other types of relationships to more appropriately isolate the role of co-consumption ties. And finally, all network studies struggle with identifying network boundaries and population criteria. We utilized a freshman orientation group, but it is impossible to deny the possibility of boundary spanners that were left out of the network. Perhaps there were key players in the friendship network that lived in a different dormitory or were a member of a different orientation group. If boundary spanners are a potential concern, future researchers might consider utilizing an ego network analysis that allows for the inclusion of such actors (Katz, Heere, & Melton, 2020; Perry, Pescosolido, & Borgatti, 2018).

Conclusion

While the bright lights of media attention and consumer interest continue to focus on "big-time" college athletics, some 440 institutions of higher learning continue to compete in Division III intercollegiate athletics. For Division III sponsoring institutions, sports on campus may not yield the same level of national publicity but they may impact key organizational goals such as persistence and retention. With nearly 20% of students not matriculating past their first year (McFarland et al., 2018) and the average institution losing nearly $10 million to student attrition, the value of Division III sports in promoting retention should not be overlooked. Scholars in student development have long emphasized the salience of peer relationships (Astin, 1999) and social integration (Tinto, 1993) in matters of persistence. Based on a two-year actor-based network study of new students, the current research found that attending sporting events on campus influenced the development of friendship ties and social integration. Sport fan ties might not cause friendships; but they are significantly related. Sport management researchers have emphasized the importance of

fan-to-fan relationships (Katz et al., 2018) and the co-creation of value among sport fans (Uhrich, 2014), and these fan ties affect the evolution of friendship ties as well.

A student's peer relationships are the single best predictor of success in college (Astin, 1999) – and for the participants in this study, the presence of Division III sports on campus assisted in the evolution of incoming friendship ties. Katz et al. (2017) stated that Division III sports represent the front porch of a small house in terms of promoting attitudes toward the larger university for new students. We extend that sentiment, showing that fan ties affect friendships and social integration. Individual attributes are no doubt important to questions surrounding retention and persistence, yet the entirety of the network tradition rests on the assumption that individual attitudes are only part of the story – individual outcomes are affected by social relationships and the resulting structure of those relationships (Robbins, 2015). As the discourse examining college sport and student attitudes continues to develop (Clopton, 2008; Heere & Katz, 2014; Wann & Robinson, 2002; Warner et al., 2011) the impact of sports on campus includes more than attitudinal development. The linkage between sports on campus and institutional outcomes includes the formation and maintenance of meaningful interpersonal relationships.

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College Student Development within the Context of Formalized Sport in American Higher Education

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To this point research on formalized sport in American higher education (i.e., recreational sport and collegiate athletics) has been limited in its conception of college student development which has limited its influence on the design and implementation of college and university sport programs. Expanding how college student development is understood would enable sport scholars to examine a wider array of educational and developmental outcomes within the college sport landscape. Not only would this fundamentally shift the type of questions asked of and about formal sport environments, it might also change how sport managers conceptualize and mobilize sport in higher education. This paper provides a foundational starting-point for sport scholars to diversify their approach to advance the study of college student development within formalized sport environments in American higher education.

Keywords: college student development, student development theory, intercollegiate athletics, recreational sport, sport clubs, intramurals

Despite its complexity, sport is often portrayed as monolithic. The prevailing assumption is that sport, as an entity, is inherently good and that, through participation alone, individuals will progress in various domains (e.g., physically, socially, morally; Coakley, 2015; Warner & Dixon, 2013; Warner, Dixon, & Chalip, 2012). Yet, in practice, actualizing the developmental potential of sport programs, particularly within an American context that often entangles sport and education (Ridpath, 2018), requires intentional design and implementation on the part of sport managers (Beyer & Hannah, 2000; Patriksson, 1995; Schulenkorf, Sherry, & Phillips, 2016). Educationally embedded sport programs, through their design and implementation, have an implicit responsibility to complement, or even enhance, the educational environment and to emphasize other non-sport outcomes (e.g., cognitive, social, emotional, moral, occupational, political).

To this point, however, research on formalized sport in American higher education (i.e., recreational sport and intercollegiate athletics) has been limited in its conception of college student development which, in turn, has limited its influence on the design and implementation of college and university sport programs. Expanding how sport scholars understand college student development would enable them to

consider a wider array of educational and developmental outcomes within the college sport landscape. This would not only fundamentally shift the type of questions asked of and about formal sport environments but might also influence how sport managers conceptualize and mobilize sport in higher education.

Thus, the goal of this paper is to provide a foundational starting-point for sport scholars to diversify their approach to the study of formalized sport environments in American higher education. The remainder of the paper will provide a brief examination of relevant literature followed by a broad discussion of college student development, the theories that inform it, and potential questions those theories might generate that are necessary to continue this conversation.

Before proceeding to an examination of literature, however, it is important to first clarify two concepts undergirding the arguments presented in this paper. First, the sport context is discussed in this paper from a global perspective so, at times, examples may seem overly general. The authors appreciate the often subtle and nuanced situational differences from one geographic location to another, from one campus to another, from one division to another or even from one team to another within a single athletic department. Examples are provided not to be applied at a micro- or even meso-level of conceptualization but rather to highlight broader issues that may be present within the American college sport context. Second, it is not the aim of this paper to advocate for one domain of development over another, but instead to illustrate the diversity of theories available for inquiry into college student development which help to broaden the conceptual understanding of various developmental outcomes within the context of American higher education.

Formalized Sport in American Higher Education

The long and storied history of sport and American higher education would be difficult to comprehensively delineate here, given that its origins predate American independence (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997; Hyatt, 1977; Ridpath, 2018; Stewart, 1992). For our purposes, though, it is important to understand that what began as intramural sport eventually unfolded into intercollegiate sport clubs which subsequently laid the foundation for the emergence of a varsity athletic system (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997; Hyatt, 1977). Since the turn of the 20th Century, however, each system has traversed vastly different trajectories to form three distinct formalized sport systems differentiated by their philosophies, structures, and desired outcomes.

Varsity Sport Programs

Philosophically, the structure and outcomes of National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) athletic programs are driven by three main considerations: educational, commercial, and competitive (Nite, Singer, & Cunningham, 2013; Snyder & Waterstone, 2015; Southall, Hancock, Cooper, & Nagel, 2009; Southall & Nagel, 2008). These considerations likely vary in order and magnitude from program to program and certainly from division to division. For example, Snyder and Waterstone (2015) noted the diversity and quantity of institutions in Division III, emphasizing differ-

ences in how athletic programs are funded and how they fit into the overall campus culture when compared to Division I or Division II institutions. A consistent theme amongst athletic departments' missions, regardless of division, is a student-centered approach to the design and implementation of their programs, although some have noted an incongruence between explicit goals and implicit expectations (Adler & Adler, 1987; Jayakumar & Comeau, 2016; Rubin & Moses, 2017).

To be sure, there are a number of positive outcomes one can associate with participation in varsity athletic programs (Chen, Snyder, & Magner, 2010). Examples might include the physical and intellectual (i.e., sport IQ) development needed to compete at the collegiate level, the ability to navigate new interpersonal relationships with teammates and coaches, the skills and strategies necessary to balance athletic and academic priorities or the unique opportunities and experiences one might access through athletic participation.

The varsity athletic environment is also unquestionably challenging. Participants are asked to adjust to a highly demanding academic and athletic schedule while simultaneously adapting to living away from home, possibly for the first time, creating new social networks and other challenges that accompany enrollment in higher education. As students persist, new challenges might arise with the realization that a professional athletic career is not feasible and that they must begin to prepare for employment that potentially relies on skills outside of their athletic abilities. The question, from a developmental perspective, then becomes how the varsity sport environment supports and hinders individual development.

From this perspective, the goal is not to eliminate all challenges, but to mitigate them to the extent that they push students without overwhelming them (Sanford, 1967). For example, a first-year college student may need assistance to plan their academic schedule, understand the registration process, or locate and attend all of their courses. Students that persist to their junior or senior year should no longer require this level of support. Certainly, this developmental progress should be seen in both athletes and non-athletes.

When varsity athletes are academically motivated, balancing academic and athletic demands may not cause issues because they are more likely to seek out their own path and take ownership of the process. If they are not particularly academically self-motivated, however, the extent to which they are pushed toward prioritizing (or even balancing) academics over athletics (which is implied by the use of terms like "student-athlete") will largely depend on the overall athletic environment. Athletic staff and administrators might only push students academically in so much as it ensures they maintain the minimum academic standards to remain eligible to compete and may over-provide academic support in a variety of ways that actually hinder athletes' ownership of their academic development.

In addition to managing academic schedules and needs, college students have other social roles that are important to holistic development. Managing additional roles can be particularly challenging as varsity programs are considered elite sport and therefore require students to commit a great deal of time and effort to their athletic development (Ayers, Pazmino-Cevallos, & Dobose, 2012; Beyer & Hannah,

2000; Gayles, 2009a, 2009b, 2014; Wolverton, 2008). Thus, the importance of other non-sport developmental areas will also likely be viewed and managed in relation to how they help or hinder students' athletic progress (Anderson & Dixon, 2019).

Thus, regarding the factors that form the overall environment in athletic programs, there are a number of layers that need to be examined to understand their role and implications. The more proximate layers consist of administrators, coaches, compliance staff, training staff, an individuals' teammates and, in some cases, academic support staff. More distal factors include instructors, university support staff, alumni, and what some refer to as *normies* or *non-athletic regular people* (NARPs) (Anderson & Dixon, 2019). Exacerbating issues within these layers is the fact that oversight of varsity programs extends beyond the philosophies, rules, and regulations of the specific institutions they represent. External influence is exerted by athletic conferences and the NCAA. These bodies make decisions directly impacting the underlying philosophies that shape the athletic environment.

Recreational Sport Programs

Intramural and club sport programs, in contrast to varsity programs, are philosophically driven by a mixture of educational, accessibility, and competitive considerations and tend to fall within the purview of campus recreation departments that report to one of three administrative areas (i.e., academics, athletics, or student affairs; Schneider, Stier Jr., Kampf, Haines, & Wilding, 2005). While exclusivity might be a hallmark of varsity athletics, "[c]ampus recreation programs have a mission of providing a variety of programs, open to all students, regardless of the participants' abilities. Primary outcomes of campus recreation programs include enhancing students' learning experiences and improved quality of campus life" (Schneider et al., p. 34). Much like varsity athletic programs, the order and magnitude of the aforementioned considerations are likely to vary from one campus to another and especially between intramural and club sports. For instance, accessibility is the most likely consideration to drive the design and implementation of intramural sport programs, whereas sport clubs are likelier to blend the three.

Sport clubs. Sport clubs are unique in that they are predominately student run and structured to accommodate different levels of participation ranging from general members to the chief operating officer of the club. Because many sport clubs operate in a resource-scarce environment, the availability, and practices, of administrators and coaches may be inconsistent. Further, because the ratio of students to administrators is likely high, student leaders may receive a disproportionate amount of support, through education and training, compared to the general members of any given club. Thus, if members seek a higher degree of involvement through the various leadership positions required to maintain a club, they may see a greater return in various developmental domains as they learn the skills necessary to lead and manage their peers (Dugan, Turman, & Torrez, 2015; Flosdorf, Carr, Carr, & Pate, 2016; Haines & Fortman, 2008). Other unique features of club sport stem from their competitive level and intake process.

While some clubs might fall in the elite sport category, most are likely to fall somewhere on a spectrum between participation and performance given that they might value both. Thus, each club may implement its own intake process that emphasizes athletic ability and aptitude, desire to learn and participate, or both. Additionally, participation in sport clubs comes subsequent to enrollment at an institution, is predominately voluntary, and can be terminated at any time without serious opportunity cost (Warner & Dixon, 2013). In this instance, voluntary refers to "the idea that one was not forced nor pressured to be part of the club or to show up at functions, but they continued their membership because they wanted to be there and were personally invested" (Warner & Dixon, 2013, p. 291). In other words, once a student joins a sport club, their continued involvement is not compulsory. This leaves students with relative flexibility to determine how much time they devote to their sport club in relation to other relevant curricular and extracurricular endeavors.

The sport club ecology resembles that of varsity sport programs to some degree. Individual participants are likely to be influenced by their teammates, club leaders, recreational sport administrators and, for some, a coach or coaches. Like varsity programs, some clubs are also regulated beyond specific campus regulations by various sport governing bodies, although these bodies tend to be more specialized than the NCAA. Examples include the National Collegiate Water Ski Association (NCWSA), National Collegiate Club Golf Association (NCCGA), or the National Intercollegiate Running Club Association (NIRCA).

Intramurals. Of the three formal sport environments discussed in this paper, intramural sport unquestionably serves the greatest number of students. However, the type and degree of development that participation can facilitate is debatable given that intramural sport is also the least formal of the three. If the student-administrator interaction is limited in the sport club environment, it is almost non-existent within the context of intramural sport. With the exception of student employees and intramural officials, participants in intramurals are unlikely to interact with a recreational sport administrator unless they display deviant behavior beyond the scope of what their peers are able to deal with. This translates to very little intentionality with respect to facilitating an environment that promotes developmental outcomes commensurate to the number of participants. The biggest benefit of intramural sport is that it provides students with a social and physical outlet that leaves ample time to devote to other curricular and extracurricular activities around campus.

College Student Development Research in Sport

The similarities and differences among formal sport contexts provide fruitful areas for inquiry. However, due to various constraints (i.e., university, discipline, community, NCAA), scholarly investigation of these contexts, particularly comparisons amongst them remains extremely limited (Coakley, 2008). Of the studies on intercollegiate athletics prior to 2008, Coakley noted that fewer than one-fifth of them examined athletes' experiences, instead focusing predominately on "organizational issues" (p. 22). And while Coakley does not address research on recreational sport

programs directly, some of the constraints he identifies, specifically those that undervalue the importance of sport as a context for study, also apply to those programs. Looking at studies published since 2008, it appears some have worked to answer Coakley's call for examination of the role of sport in individual college student development, but the range of questions being asked and the approaches used to answer them remains narrow.

The authors of the current paper identified 11 studies examining student development in both varsity ($f = 8$) and recreational sport ($f = 3$) environments. Of the nine that explicitly identified their theoretical framework, all used some combination of theoretical frames designed by Astin, Chickering, or Kuh (Andrassy, Svensson, Bruening, Hum, & Chung, 2014; Comeaux, Speer, Taustine, & Harrison, 2011; Dugan, Turman, & Torrez, 2015; Folsdorf et al., 2016; Forrester, 2015; Gayles & Hu, 2009; Gayles, Rockenbach, & Davis, 2012; Huntrods, An, & Pascarella, 2017; Navarro & Malvaso, 2015). This observation is not meant to diminish the work of these scholars; on the contrary their work is integral to broadening our understanding of both sport contexts. Instead, it is meant to highlight the central issue of this paper, that there is a need to diversify the theoretical frameworks used to ask and answer questions within these environments. Not only would this enhance our understanding of participants experiences, it would also provide a more comprehensive overview of areas of congruence and incongruence between sport programs and the educational institutions they represent.

Further limiting our conception and understanding of the sport context in American higher education is the lack of research between sports and between sport contexts. For example, Warner and Dixon (2013) noted:

> much of the sports literature has assumed that sporting environments are uniform or homogenous by comparing sports participants to nonparticipants and not looking at variations within these groups; that is, such studies treat all sporting environments and participant experiences as if they were consistently identical. (p. 286)

This approach overlooks contextual features that are distinct from one sport to another (e.g., football and baseball), gender differences within the same sport (e.g., men's and women's basketball), or contextual differences driven by competitive emphasis (e.g., varsity soccer and club soccer). This lack of disaggregation is evident in research in both varsity and recreational sport environments.

The Concept of College Student Development

Literature on college student development represents a distinctive subset of research in human development and is rooted in debates dating back to the early 20th century regarding the purpose of American higher education and the proper approach for educators and administrators to adopt when working with college students (Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016). The first formal philosophical guidance came

in the form of the 1937 Student Personnel Point of View and its 1949 expansion. These documents prescribed a comprehensive approach to working with students as individuals with unique needs both within and outside of the classroom (American Council on Education, 1994a, 1994b). Under this premise, various scholars began extending the work of pioneering developmental theorists, like Jean Piaget and Erik Ericson, into the college and university context to examine how students develop during their time on campus and how to maximize this development through intentional efforts on the part of student affairs professionals (Patton et al., 2016).

Though scholars have proposed numerous definitions for student development, this paper will proceed with the following: "a process of more or less gradual change resulting in (what can be reconstructed as) one or more qualitatively different stages for which the prior stages are necessary conditions" (van Haaften, 1996, p. 18). It is also important to note that there is no single theory capable of providing universal insight into student development and it is therefore necessary to consult multiple theoretical domains to gain a comprehensive understanding of how students develop and the factors that help or hinder that development. Table 1 provides an overview of the domains to be discussed in this paper along with corresponding theories that fall within that domain.

Stage theories, like many of those discussed in this paper, provide scholars with two distinct but interrelated approaches to the study of development within the con-

Table 1
Student Development Domains

Developmental Domain	**Primary Concern**	**Examples**
Person-Environment	Characteristics of developmental environment; role of the individual in own development; role of educators to foster development	• Theory of Student Involvement (Astin, 1984) • Theory of Challenge & Support (Sanford, 1967) • Human Ecology Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) • Person-Environment Theory (Holland, 1997)
Psychosocial	Interpersonal and intrapersonal developmental outcomes	• Lifespan Development (Erikson, 1959) • Ego Identity Statuses (Marcia, 1966) • Theory of Identity Development (Chickering, 1969) • Theory of Women's Development (Josselson, 1973)
Cognitive-Structural	Epistemological and moral developmental outcomes	• Theory of Cognitive Development (Piaget, 1952) • Theory of Intellectual and Ethical Development (Perry, 1968) • Women's Ways of Knowing (Belenky et al., 1986) • Theory of Moral Development (Kohlberg, 1976) • Theory of Women's Moral Development (Gilligan, 1982)

text of American higher education. First, there is the logical progression of stages that allow researchers to reconstruct and characterize where individuals are in their own developmental journey. These stages are described in the following way:

> . . . rather like a road map, showing a limited number of relevant features and deliberately leaving out much other information . . . [to highlight] a certain developmental pattern, stressing certain aspects at the expense of others. Because of different theoretical interests, different reconstructions are possible in the same area without falsifying each other (van Haaften, 1996, p. 27).

In other words, the stages outlined in a specific theory are not meant to be applied to individuals universally, but rather provide a template for comparison to understand where someone is in their own development and where they might be headed next.

The second approach, which is more typical for researchers to adopt, focuses more on describing and explaining how individuals move from one stage to another. If we consider stages as destinations, then this approach can be characterized as examining an individuals' journey from one stage to the next. The primary concern in this approach is understanding the contextual experience of the individual within the framework of stages prescribed by the theory. Two things are important to consider when using this approach. First, it is highly individualized. If a theory prescribes four stages of development in a specific domain, transition from one stage to another may lack uniformity from one person to the next. For example, while one individuals' transition might proceed progressively (i.e., 1-2-3-4), another's may be less homogenous (i.e., 1-2-3-2-3-4). Second, an individual's transition between stages can be "smooth and continuous" or "abrupt and discontinuous" (van Haaften, p. 23) depending on the environment and what triggers development from one stage to another.

With these considerations in mind, the following section provides an overview of each domain in Table 1 with a brief explanation of some of the more broadly applied theories that fall within them.

Student Development Theories

The following sections aim to provide a streamlined overview of various theoretical approaches and considerations with respect to college student development. It is worth noting that some of these theories were designed specifically in and for the college environment, while others were designed more broadly and have since been successfully applied to social and educational settings.

Person-Environment Theories

Person-environment theories focus on the development that results from the interplay between individuals and the various environments to which they are exposed. Dewey (1916), applying this concept to education, argued that all parties (e.g., faculty, staff, students) must actively participate to optimize education and that special attention should be given to the environment in which education takes place. Lewin

(1936) echoed these sentiments, explaining that "every psychological event depends upon the state of the person and at the same time on the environment, although their relative importance is different in different cases" (p. 9). That is, individual behavior (*B*) can be viewed as a function of both the person (*P*) and the environment (*E*) (i.e., $B = f$ (P, E), Lewin, 1936). Environmental factors impacting student development may include the size and type of institution (e.g., large public vs. small private), the focus of the curriculum and faculty (e.g., research vs. liberal arts), campus culture, and/or friend groups.

Individual development is not unique to the college setting given that "most young people will experience conflicts that challenge their perspectives and subsequently spur their progress" (Long, 2012, p. 51), be it through college enrollment, military service, or the work force. Person-environment theories, therefore, aim to examine the unique features of the higher education environment, the educator's responsibilities in shaping that environment, and the role of the individual in their own development. Given that both formal sport environments fall within the broader scope of the college environment, these theories provide sport scholars with frameworks to understand the implications for where students spend their time and energy and the type of environment that staff, coaches, and administrators produce.

Holland's Person-Environment Theory (1997) focuses on vocational satisfaction by suggesting that individuals can be characterized within various personality types (i.e., realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, conventional) and that satisfaction is likelier when the vocational environment compliments an individual's personality. This relationship is, to some extent, cyclical in that the more dominant a personality type is, the more likely it is to shape the overall environment and, thus, attract more individuals that embody similar characteristics. Despite its original focus on the vocational environment, the archetypes and constructs proposed within the theory have applications in other social and educational environments (Patton et al., 2016).

Bronfenbrenner's Human Ecology Theory (1979) provides a lens with which to view the individual and environmental factors influencing individual development. The theory outlined four components (*process, person, context*, and *time*) that educators should consider when determining the impact of the environment on students' development. The context is comprised of four systems that range from proximate (i.e., microsystems) to distal (i.e., macrosystem), with meso- and exosystems between. The further the system is from the individual, the less concrete its influence on that person's development.

Astin's Theory of Student Involvement (1984) emphasizes the importance of previous experiences students bring with them into the broader higher education environment and the unique lens created by the interaction between the two. To maximize student development, Astin simultaneously stressed the importance of active involvement (through both time and energy) on the part of the student *and* high-quality, relatable programs on the part of educators.

Sanford's Theory of Challenge and Support (1967) underscores the necessity for students to experience *challenges* which in turn produce disequilibrium and pro-

voke their development. Sanford equally stressed the importance of not over- or under-challenging students. Toward that end, Sanford advocated that educators understand how to gauge a students' *readiness* to deal with environmental challenges and, utilizing that assessment, produce corresponding levels of *support* (or challenge if none is inherently present within the environment). Too much support may lead to stagnation, while too little support (especially in the face of high levels of challenge) could cause students to stall or even regress in their development.

Utilizing these theories to examine the formal sport environment provides researchers with both qualitative and quantitative factors to consider, particularly relative to college student development. For instance, using student involvement theory allows researchers to examine where students are allocating their time (i.e., quantitative) and energy (i.e., qualitative) to determine the implications for their overall development. Sanford, Holland, and Bronfenbrenner provide frameworks for examining the influence of educators in particular environments and at different strata of those environments.

The theories in this domain, then, expand the current over-reliance on investigations based in student involvement theory. Instead, leveraging the breadth of these theories, the following are examples of questions toward college student development in various sport contexts that might be explored using theories in the person-environment domain. What are the implicit and explicit messages resonating from the sport environment and how do these impact conceptualizations of development at both the individual and a systemic level? How are participants in different sport contexts spending their time and energy and what are the developmental implications of these allocations? How might administrators shift or shape the sport environment toward non-athletic outcomes without sacrificing athletic outcomes? What are students' roles in shaping the sport environment; their own development? How does this differ among varsity, club, and intramural sport? How do staff, coaches, or administrators in various contexts gauge students' readiness to meet certain challenges present in the broader university environment? Does this vary systemically according to context (varsity, club, intramural)? If so, what are the implications for change? How do staff, coaches, or administrators avoid over-supporting students to a debilitating degree? What factors in a sport context facilitate dependence and independence?

Person-environment theories, then, have strong potential for inquiry in this area. However, these theories are less focused on the more micro or nuanced outcomes of individual development. For answers to those questions one must turn to theories within the other developmental domains.

Psychosocial Theories

Psychosocial theories focus on the convergence of psychological and social factors that form one's conception of "how to define themselves, their relationships with others, and what to do with their lives" (Patton et al., 2016, p. 283). These theories tend to focus more on interpersonal and intrapersonal developmental outcomes and are arranged in stages similar to those described earlier. As Erikson (1959) explained, "earlier crystallizations of identity can become subject to renewed conflict,

when changes in the quality and quantity of drive, expansions in mental equipment, and new and often conflicting social demands all make previous adjustments appear insufficient" (p. 124).

Erikson (1959; 1994) extended the concept of development beyond simply the interaction of the person and the environment, postulating that there were also internal psychological processes and external social influences that determined an individuals' development. Erikson described development from childhood to late adulthood in eight stages differentiated by "turning points." The first four stages (*Basic Trust versus Mistrust, Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt, Initiative versus Guilt, Industry versus Inferiority)* described the journey through early childhood into adolescence and early adulthood. In stage five (*Identity versus Identity Diffusion*) individuals gain independence and typically begin the process of forming their own identity. If certain factors (e.g., cognitive development, societal pressure) are lacking, individuals may experience confusion or lack bearing in their identity development.

The final three stages (*Intimacy versus Isolation, Generativity versus Stagnation, Integrity versus Despair*) described how individuals progressed into later adulthood. Each of these stages was influenced by the outcome of stage five. Individuals who formed a strong sense of identity were more likely to experience intimacy, generativity, and integrity. Conversely those who struggled to form their identity may experience isolation, stagnation, and despair.

Building on Erikson's fifth stage, Marcia (1966; 1976; 1980) introduced the concept of identity statuses to provide a mechanism for empirically investigating psychosocial development. These four statuses (*diffusion, moratorium, foreclosure*, and *achievement*) framed identity development within the interaction between two dimensions: *exploration* and *commitment*. Exploration, also referred to as crisis, signified an individuals' willingness to engage with competing sets of ideals to determine the most salient. Commitment referred to an individuals' personal investment and degree of confidence in their decisions. The goals and values of individuals in diffusion (low commitment, low exploration) or foreclosure (high commitment, low exploration) are influenced by external social forces (e.g., parents, educators, coaches). Conversely, those that fall within moratorium (low commitment, high exploration) or achievement (high commitment, high exploration) relied more on an internal locus of control to determine their goals and values.

One limitation of both Erikson's and Marcia's work was the inadequate scope regarding gender—an issue addressed by Josselson's Theory of Women's Development (1973). Josselson used Marcia's four identity statuses to discern differences in how women resolve or avoid identity crisis. *Guardians* (foreclosures) internalized the values of their parents and "sought security in relationships, chose partners who shared their perception of family life, and were psychologically tied to the centrality of family" (Patton et al., 2016, p. 294). *Drifters* (diffusions) were difficult to characterize because they lacked exploration and commitment for various reasons (e.g., psychological trauma, indecision, passive participation in their own lives).

Searchers (moratoriums) similarly embodied their parents' values but were pushed into exploration when they encountered other options. Women in this catego-

ry tended to avoid identifying with their mothers while simultaneously romanticizing their fathers. *Pathmakers* (achievers) broke with their childhood values and formed multiple, diverse identities. These women were more concerned with self-affirmation than outside approval, basing their personal relationships on mutual need rather than social *mores*.

Finally, Chickering and Reisser (1993), expanding the scope of Chickering's (1969) earlier work, suggested that students traverse seven vectors (see Figure 1) integral to their overall identity development. Students begin by *developing competence*. In this vector students acquire new interpersonal, intrapersonal, and physical skills shaped by the educational and social environment. As students develop greater competence, they also gain confidence in their abilities and lay the foundation for successive vectors. From here, students move into one or more of three vectors: (a) *managing emotions*, (b) *moving through autonomy toward interdependence*, or (c) *developing mature interpersonal relationships*.

In the managing emotions vector students gain greater awareness and regulation of their own emotions and learn how to contextualize their emotional responses to various social situations. Moving through autonomy requires individuals to learn problem solving skills to handle various situations independent of authority figures they may have relied on previously. During this process students gain emotional and instrumental independence and ultimately come to understand the need for interdependence, rather than dependence, on those around them. Students in the developing mature interpersonal relationships vector learn to first tolerate and eventually appreciate others based on their differences. Additionally, these individuals develop a capacity for healthier intimacy.

As students grow and develop in these various areas, they move into the *establishing identity* vector and begin to establish a stronger overall sense of identity. In this vector individuals develop a more secure self-concept, both internally and within the context of feedback from others, and understand where they fall in the greater social, historical, and cultural landscape. In the final two vectors, *developing purpose*

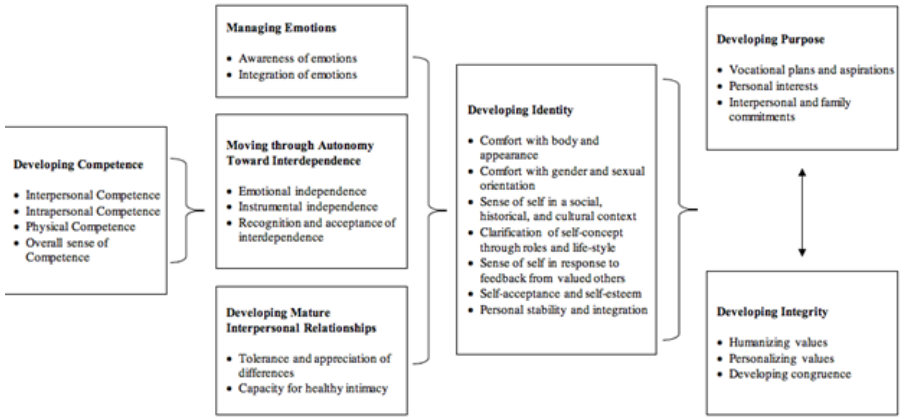

Figure 1. Chickering and Reisser's vectors (Adapted from Patton et al., 2016).

and *developing integrity*, students begin to align their career goals, personal interests, and behaviors with their internal values and goals. The likelihood of students engaging with the first four vectors during their time on campus is higher than the last three, although some students may graduate having fully developed integrity and their sense of purpose.

These theories allow researchers to understand how individuals understand themselves, both internally and externally, in relation to their social settings. The following are examples of questions regarding development that might be answered using psychosocial theories. What role does sport participation play in how students develop various non-athletic aspects of their identity (e.g., racial, spiritual/faith, sexual)? How do socialization practices in various sport settings impact students' interpersonal relationships with athletes and non-athletes? How do socialization strategies impact students' intrapersonal self-concept? How does this role vary based on sport context? How does sport participation build transferable skills that will be beneficial for future employability, and how does this vary by context? Are there factors related to club vs intramural vs varsity sport that promote or hinder this type of development? Does an individual's role as an athlete create conflict with other non-athletic roles they occupy? Is this conflict experienced differently for varsity vs club sport athletes? In what ways and how is this relevant to development? What role do various types of athletic participation play in promoting the development of autonomy within a collaborative, team-based environment?

Cognitive-Structural Theories

Similar to psychosocial theories, cognitive-structural theories are organized into hermeneutic stages that build upon one another and provide insight into how students derive experiential meaning. However, theories in this domain are concerned with how individuals develop meaning-making processes to improve their epistemic and moral reasoning.

Cognitive-structural theories examine the epistemological and ethical "structures that shape how people view their experiences" (Patton et al., 2016, p. 275). Developmentally, this is important because the orientation of one's meaning-making will ideally shift from externally to internally driven processes as students are exposed to novel and increasingly complex information and environments. These theories provide insight into the ways that students receive and interpret information and how that information is subsequently applied to their worldview and actions. This has applications and implications both within and outside of college sport environments.

Many of the theories in this domain build from Piaget's (1952) pioneering work on the cognitive differences between children and adults. Piaget operated under the assumption that children were not merely less competent thinkers than adults but instead structured the processes in their thinking in completely different ways. His Theory of Cognitive Development was comprised of four stages (*sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational*, *and formal operational)* that built on an increasingly complex catalog of *schemas* which he defined as "a cohesive, repeatable action

sequence possessing component actions that are tightly interconnected and governed by a core meaning" (p. 7). As individuals are presented with novel environmental stimuli (e.g., experiences, information), they either *assimilate* those stimuli into existing schemas, or restructure those schemas to *accommodate* the new information and return to a state of cognitive *equilibrium*.

Piaget's work sparked two streams of inquiry within the cognitive-structural domain: epistemological and moral development. Epistemological development is concerned with the underlying cognitive structures that shape how individuals decipher implicitly and explicitly held assumptions about the world around them (Boom, 1996). It determines which sources an individual deems legitimate for taking in and creating new knowledge about the world. Moral development, while related, employs cognitive structures in a different way. Korthals (1996) identified four interwoven cognitive and emotional abilities related to morality: 1) perspective taking ability in social settings, 2) the ability to legislate one's own moral norms, 3) the ability to discreetly apply those norms, and 4) the ability to choose the moral norms to which one conforms.

Epistemological development. Perry (1968) extended Piaget's (1952) work into the context of higher education and shifted his focus toward the cognitive transition from adolescence to adulthood. The Theory of Intellectual and Ethical Development is concerned with the cognitive complexity that individuals develop when presented with mutually exclusive information. Opting for positions instead of stages, Perry found that individuals began from a position of *duality* (i.e., viewing the world in opposing absolutes) where information is derived almost exclusively from authority figures and individuals adhere to the notion that a correct answer exists for any situation. As they are exposed to increasingly dissonant information, individuals begin to transition from dualism to *multiplicity*. These individuals may initially hold mutually exclusive ideas as equally true but eventually begin to shift their orientation from receivers of expert knowledge to independent thinkers.

As individuals become more comfortable with the ambiguity of multiplistic thinking, the need for underlying support for their arguments becomes more evident and they begin to transition into *relativism* where opinions from diverse sources no longer carry the same weight. Because ambiguity is often accompanied by feelings of unease, it is possible that some will try to *deflect* from their cognitive development. Deflections may manifest in one of three ways: (a) *temporizing* (i.e., stalling forward movement), (b) *escape* (i.e., abandoning the responsibility inherent in moving from one stage to the next) or (c) *retreat* (i.e., a return to dualism due to overstimulation).

One area where Perry's (1968) theory was lacking was in the level of inclusiveness with respect to the sample used to formulate the theory's tenets. Patton et al. (2016) pointed out that "attempting to generalize from a study of primarily traditionally aged white males at a prestigious institution in the late 1950s is risky and unwise. Cautious use [. . .] in relation to women, people of color, and other minoritized groups is advisable" (p. 330). Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) worked to remedy this situation, at least to some degree, with their Theory of Women's Ways of Knowing. The authors opted for five *perspectives* in favor of

stages: (a) *silence,* (b) *received knowledge*, (c) *subjective knowledge*, (d) *procedural knowledge*, and (e) *constructed knowledge*.

From the perspective of silence, they argued women were highly dependent on authority figures, tending not to express their own thoughts and viewing decisions as either right or wrong. These women were likely to have experienced some type of physical or emotional abuse. The other four perspectives differed in the level of confidence women had in their voice. In the received perspective, individuals take in information and adapt their behaviors accordingly, but lack the confidence to shape their own thoughts and opinions. As women progressed into the subjective perspective, they came to understand that their views did not necessarily have to align with those of authority figures, but they still lacked the confidence to externalize their own opinions. Those in the procedural perspective began to not only trust their own voice, but also to vocalize that voice to others without fear of repercussion. Finally, those women who fell into the constructed perspective understood the importance of listening to others' voices while not losing their own voice. These individuals saw knowledge creation as a collaborative process between themselves and those around them.

The following are examples of questions that might be answered using epistemological theories. For each question, it is implied that it would be asked within and between various sport contexts, exploring how differences in the structure and implementation of sport in that context intermingle with both the questions and the participant outcomes. How does the administrator-student relationship in various sport environments impact students' epistemological development and, if it does, in what directions and to what degrees? Under what conditions can sport participation lead to cognitive regression? Are sport environments epistemologically at odds with the educational environment? If so, why and how and what makes them so? How does sport participation in its various forms influence how students make meaning of their experiences (or vice versa)? How can readily available emotionally charged experiences in sport be used to help students learn and practice meaning-making? Do higher level cognitive structures impact athletic performance? How does this vary by sport, demographics, and sport structure? Could higher levels of cognitive reasoning provide a competitive edge (i.e., decision making at an integral moment of the game)?

Moral development. Also encompassed in the cognitive-structural domain are theories that deal with students' moral development. Similar to Perry (1968), Kohlberg (1976) based his moral development work on Piaget's (1952) earlier theories on cognitive development, focusing his attention first on adolescent boys before shifting to college students. His Theory of Moral Development established six justice-oriented stages (*heteronomous morality; individualistic, instrumental morality; interpersonally normative morality; social system morality; human rights and social welfare morality; morality of universalizable, reversible, and prescriptive general ethical principles*) to explain the progression of individuals' moral development.

In the first stage, right and wrong are determined by the rules set forth by authority figures and the goal is to avoid negative consequences. In subsequent stages mo-

rality becomes more ambiguous. In stage two, the concept of fairness is introduced and individuals view morality in terms of weighing their own interests against the interests of others. Individuals in stage three are still influenced by external factors and view morality in terms of being a good person to those closest to them. In stage four individuals gain an understanding of broader societal constructs that govern the actions of those around them and aim to uphold those constructs. When individuals arrive at stage five, there is a shift toward the greater good and understanding that morality often relies on agreements between the individual and others. The final stage, for which Kohlberg lacked empirical evidence, requires individuals to learn to balance all points of view and provide equal consideration for each of them to try to arrive at universally applicable principles.

Consistent with other early theories in the student development literature, Kohlberg's theory was fundamentally flawed in terms of generalizability because it only considered moral development from a justice perspective and focused exclusively on men, though it should be noted that he was receptive to these criticisms and made efforts to correct them in his later work (Korthals, 1996). Gilligan (1982) worked to remedy this situation with her Theory of Women's Moral Development. She shifted the focus of morality from a justice orientation to an ethic of care, outlining three levels (*orientation to individual survival, goodness as self-sacrifice*, and *the morality of nonviolence*) with two accompanying transition periods (*from selfishness to responsibility* and *from goodness to truth*). Each level articulated the relationship of the individual to others, while the transitions emphasized changes to the sense of self. In level one, individuals focused only on themselves and found it difficult to differentiate their wants from needs. From this self-centered position, individuals transition to level two where they seek social acceptance, sometimes at their own expense, and, in some cases, the final level where the wants and needs of both the self and others are considered equally.

Again, with emphasis on exploring similarities and differences among college sport contexts, the following are examples of questions that might be explored using moral development theories. What impact do various forms of sport participation have on students' formulation of justice? What factors within the sport context inform that formulation? What impact does moral development have on how students formulate an ethic of care? In what ways do various forms of sport participation serve as a microcosm of broader morality and what impact does this have on an individual's moral development? In what ways can various forms of sport participation encourage deviance and what impact does that have on an individual's moral development? What factors within the sport environment encourage or discourage deviance?

Conclusion

This paper draws attention to the various sport environments that exist within American higher education and echo the sentiments of Warner and Dixon (2013) in their call for studies examining "sport participant experiences within and between contexts" (p. 286). While these contexts are inextricably linked by their origins, their present-day structures and implementations vary dramatically and provide interesting areas of inquiry to better understand the place of each in higher education and in sport. Gaining an understanding of largely ignored environments (i.e., sport clubs) could lead to the promotion of those settings as valuable developmental contexts. Additionally, it is important for scholars to understand the similarities and differences among these contexts in order to discern the benefits and drawbacks that might result from participation and ultimately inform ways to improve college student development.

We argue that present-day structures, combined with underlying philosophical considerations and tensions within various sport contexts, likely shape the general approach toward college student development within each environment. Without empirical investigation, which is currently lacking across the literature base, we hesitate to suggest which sport context is likelier to facilitate or inhibit individual development. Therefore, it is imperative that we explore integrated approaches to college student development both within and between contexts to fully explain what and how and why the sport context matters in shaping student development outcomes.

Simultaneously, the preceding sections illustrate both the breadth and nuance of developmental areas of inquiry within American collegiate sport that could be explored with a greater understanding of the theoretical frames available as lenses. In this, we hope to challenge sport scholars to continually expand the questions they ask of and about sport in higher education. Broadening the conception of college student development allows scholars to consider both athletic and non-athletic outcomes that have largely been overlooked in formal sport environments to this point (e.g., epistemological and moral development).

Specifically, this paper provides an overview of college student development, various developmental domains, some of the fundamental theories that fall within those domains, as well as potential questions that one might generate using those theories. By expanding the conceptualization of college sport and student development our aim is to advance the ways that sport is studied in higher education environments, how that inquiry informs the design and implementation of various sport programs and the impact of those programs on individual participants.

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