WHEN SPIKES AND STUDIES COLLIDE: THE LIFE OF A COLLEGIATE RUNNER

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Six female cross-county runners currently competing at universities with Division I designations in the Midwest participated in this small-scale study which aimed to uncover the perceived academic advantages and disadvantages associated with being a collegiate athlete. The study also aimed to investigate why collegiate athletes tend to remain a part of their respective teams, knowing all of the time commitments and sacrifices that team membership involves. Said study utilized phenomenology and gathered data through a combination of structured interviews, class schedules, and the observation of a practice. Findings suggested that time management skills and efficiency are huge factors in the success that collegiate athletes experience academically. Furthermore, it was indicated that access to study tables, additional tutors, and priority scheduling are among the educational advantages that collegiate athletes experience. Conversely, a lack of free time and having to sacrifice social aspects of the college experience were among the disadvantages that said athletes felt they sometimes had to deal with.

In terms of continued participation, all six females indicated that team membership was extremely important to them. Not only did it provide them with a sense of belonging, an immediate group of friends, and a support system, but it also helped them to hone a number of skills that they believed would serve them well in the post-college world.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In today’s society, athleticism is a quality revered by many (Baxter, Margavio, & Lambert, 1996). Professional athletes are individuals that the rest of the world admire and look to as role models due to their extensive training and hard work. As the times have progressed, the nature of the sports that these athletes represent has done the same. The participants have become bigger, stronger, and faster, while the games, as a whole, have become more interesting to watch (Halberstam, 2003). However, the majority of professional athletes are not born with unsurpassable talent, and most are forced to spend a portion of their youth perfecting their skills and refining their natural abilities (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998).

College is the environment that a number of athletes select to further enhance their skills. In the college environment there are coaches, teammates, and workout regimes that are intended to encourage and help them improve. In addition, athletes are given guidance and are intentionally taught certain techniques to help their game progress. A number of resources are afforded to collegiate athletes to assist them in their quest to make it to the big leagues, and at the same time college allows these individuals to pursue an education that they can fall back on if the realm of professional sports does not come through (Ting, 2009).

The problem, then, is one that is somewhat overt in nature. Being a member of a collegiate team is something that takes up a lot of time. Workouts, cross-training, practices, and competitive events make up a large chunk out of an athlete’s schedule on any given day (Potuto, 2010). Coupled with classes, study table requirements, team building exercises, and athletic meetings, it is apparent that there is not a lot of extra time for these collegiate athletes to utilize in whatever manner they see fit (Root, 2009). Additionally, there are times when these athletes are forced to miss class in order to compete in their respective sports. This is problematic
because athletics are intended to be secondary in nature to the higher education that college offers students.

It seems that the “college” that collegiate athletes experience is a bit different than the “college” that is experienced by other undergraduates. Root (2009) asserts that collegiate athletes are often pressured toward specific class schedules and even certain majors so that their schedules are not as academically demanding during the in-season. The athletic schedules these individuals must adhere to are extensive enough that free time is almost nonexistent. Furthermore, these athletes are so busy representing the educational institution they attend that they do not really have the chance to break free and socialize, and to ultimately become their own person, which is part of what the college experience is all about (Ting, 2009).

Female athletes, in particular, face a number of unique challenges that affect them deeply. According to both Klossner (2000) and Fruth (1995), female athletes are forced to deal with pressures that revolve around their body image, weight loss, and their actual performance in their respective sport. This is problematic in that it can lead to health issues such as eating disorders, loss of menstrual cycles, and also osteoporosis. In worst-case scenarios, female athletes may find themselves dealing with all three of those problems, which are collectively referred to as the female athlete triad (Zawila, Steib, & Hoogenboom, 2003).

Thompson (2007) and Skolnick (1993) both emphasize how many health benefits exist for individuals that participate in sports. However, they also stress that college-age women participating in athletics should be provided with education and counseling pertaining to the female athlete triad. Little non-health-related literature exists regarding the experiences of female cross-country runners during their college years.
This study aimed to take a closer look at the lifestyle of a collegiate athlete. More specifically, it set out to investigate what it truly means to be a female cross-country runner at a Midwestern University with a Division I designation. While there is data in existence which reflects the health issues that female athletes face, very little information exists about the perceptions and opinions that female cross-country runners have about their participation in collegiate athletics.

**Impetus and Methods**

Due to the lack of accessible information dealing with these specific facets of female athlete life, I felt that this study was extremely important to conduct. It held the potential to generate new knowledge about the perceptions that female cross-country runners had about their participation in collegiate athletics. Personal interviews, breakdowns of schedules, and an observation of practice were all employed in order to paint an accurate picture of the life that these female athletes have chosen to lead. The hope was to discover what it was about being a part of a team that encouraged these female runners to return year after year. Additionally, this study worked to uncover what it was, specifically, that these particular female runners on the college stage found to be rewarding about their standing as athletes, as well as what they found to be the advantages and disadvantages of this position. It also provided me with an opportunity to ask these women about their participation in collegiate athletics, and to see what they found to be particularly rewarding about their standing as athletes. It was my hope to uncover some new data about the experiences of the female athlete, as said experiences have historically been overlooked by researchers in order to ensure that the focus of female athlete research remained on specific health issues.
**Personal Interest**

During my own college years, I befriended a number of athletes and some of my own family members have participated as collegiate athletes. As a result I had always felt that the subject of collegiate athletics was something that was interesting to learn about. My familiarity with the subject had resulted in some knowledge about what it takes for an individual to be a collegiate athlete. Specifically, I had observed the toll that team membership can take on a person as a result of the long practices, the class absences, and the missed opportunities to participate in certain college activities. Conversely, I had also witnessed the dedication of these individuals to their respective sports, and the way that they continue to come back regardless of the extensive practices, and the other obligations that they know team membership entails.

**Research Questions**

The main focus of this study was to gain a better understanding of what the college experience has been like for female cross-country runners at Midwestern universities with Division I designations. In order to successfully accomplish this, the following questions were the focus of the research conducted:

1. What are the perceived academic advantages and disadvantages associated with being an athlete for a University/College?
2. Why do female cross-country runners continue to participate during their college years?

**Summary of Chapters**

The second chapter includes the literature that exists about being a collegiate athlete. More specifically, the literature reviews the time commitment issue, the expectations that these athletes are expected to meet, and the disadvantages/stressors associated with collegiate athletics. It also evaluates the academic advantages and disadvantages collegiate athletes are afforded, the
advantages generally associated with competing at the collegiate level, the role of gender in collegiate athletics, and female participation in the sport of cross-country running.

The third chapter discusses the methodology utilized in this research study. It includes the research design, the procedures followed to both gather and analyze data. The fourth chapter discusses the results of the study, garnered through interviews, the observation of a practice, and the schedules of each of the athletes. Vignettes and assertions in the form of codes are employed in order to illustrate the data in a manner that answers the research questions. The fifth and final chapter, then, describes the conclusions and implications of the study, as well as recommendations for future research.

**Definition of Terms**

*National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)* - The NCAA is an association responsible for organizing athletics at universities and colleges with Division I, II, and III designations all across the United States (Potuto, 2010).

*Collegiate Athlete* – This term is used whenever discussing individuals who participate in athletics on the collegiate stage. For the purposes of this study, it is a term that is used mainly when discussing female cross-country runners at schools with Division I designations.

*Qualitative* - A specific approach to conducting research that revolves around thick descriptions of people, places, and experiences, using words rather than statistical information (Maxwell, 2005).

*Cross-Training* - An extremely versatile form of exercise often utilized by athletes who must remain well-conditioned in order to compete in their respective sports. Not only does cross-training keep athletes in shape, but it also adds variety to workout regimes and helps to alleviate boredom during workouts. Furthermore, this particular form of exercise can also be used by
injured athletes because it helps to provide them with alternative exercises to complete (Cooper, 2010).

*Universities* – For the purposes of this study, the term university was used whenever universities or colleges with Division I designations were discussed. Because both terms describe institutes of higher learning, selecting one to serve as an all-encompassing term seemed to be a wise choice, as it prevented readers from getting confused.

*Scholarships* - A term used whenever financial aid, which has been awarded to collegiate athletes on the basis of their academic abilities, is discussed.

*Athleticships* - A term used whenever financial aid, which has been awarded to collegiate athletes on the basis of their athletic merits, is discussed.

*Female Athlete Triad* - A phrase used to describe the three most common health ailments female athletes encounter as a result of their athleticism and the pressures associated with competition. The triad includes eating disorders, the loss of menstrual cycles, and osteoporosis.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Individuals who take it upon themselves to participate in collegiate athletics tend to find themselves living a double life when it comes to their college years. In a sense, athletes are non-traditional college students because they have a set of experiences that are unique, and quite unlike anything that non-athletes encounter (Aries, McCarthy, Salovey, & Banaji, 2004). They have to spend one half of their time dedicated to classes, homework, and the standard “college experience,” while the other half of their time is spent at practices, workouts, and competitions for their respective sports.

This chapter focuses on the rules, regulations, and issues that collegiate athletes have to deal with on a regular basis. It delves deeper into the research that already exists on this particular topic, and contains information about the time commitments required, the advantages and disadvantages of being an athlete on the collegiate stage, and the role of gender that exists in athletics. It also expounds on the expectations that coaches and colleges, alike, have for their athletes.

Time Commitment

Collegiate athletics requires athletes to dedicate a significant portion of their available time to the sport in which they are participants (Ayers, Pazmino-Cevallos, & Dobose, 2012). These athletes have consciously made the decision to be a part of a team and to represent a particular college or university, at the cost of giving up much of their free time. However, the time demanded of these students by their respective universities and colleges is extremely excessive. In fact “the NCAA has responded to critics by limiting the number of hours student athletes spend on athletic activities, restricting the number of student athletes who live together on campus, and requiring academic support services for student athletes at Division I
institutions” (Gayles & Hu, 2009, p. 101). More specifically, the NCAA has mandated that athletes on the college stage only be permitted to participate in 20 hours of athletic-related ventures per week, during the period of time that their respective sport is considered to be in-season. This is a significant allowance on the part of the NCAA, because by taking a stand and limiting the amount of time that athletes can spend practicing and competing each week, the NCAA has illustrated the importance that an education holds over athletics (Ayers et al., 2012). Furthermore, it should be noted that the interventions made on the part of the NCAA, in terms of how many hours a week athletes may practice, are also necessary because if there were no guidelines which specified how much time athletes could spend competing or practicing, certain coaches would abuse their power (Baxter et al., 1996). They might even start requiring their athletes to spend all of their extra time practicing, in order to have an advantage over other teams (Potuto, 2010).

Oftentimes, universities are responsible for controlling many different aspects of collegiate athletes’ lives simply because competing at the collegiate level involves a number of both physical and mental rigors (Root, 2009). In many cases, athletes receive scholarships, which help them to pay for, in part or in full, their college education. It seems only logical that a university would expect something in return for that sort of investment, and the return that they expect tends to be performance-based. Having said that, it must also be noted that these individuals are “not exploited because their scholarships [not “athleticships”] provide the opportunity to earn a college degree” (Eckard, 2010, p. 45). Universities look out for the athletes that compete for them, especially when it comes to the educational aspect of higher learning and making sure that these individuals have access to educational services such as tutors or study tables is a priority.
Results which bring pride and prestige to specific colleges or universities, will not be generated without a fair amount of effort being put in on the part of the athletes, themselves. Therefore, making sure that a specific amount of time is spent practicing, working out, or competing each week, is extremely important. However, in order to ensure that collegiate athletes are able to consistently compete and perform at optimal levels, it is oftentimes necessary for the represented universities to dictate how the education and free time of said individuals will be spent (Root, 2009). It seems clear that time is a valuable commodity for collegiate athlete, due simply to the fact that they do not possess a lot of it that is not already mapped and scheduled, in terms of how they are expected to spend it.

Expectations

Athletes are held to a number of different standards during their college years. Their coaches are held accountable for their win-loss records, and are hired, as well as compensated, accordingly (Potuto, 2010). As a result, they ask a great deal of their athletes. Members of collegiate teams are encouraged to maintain a specific grade point average, and to be in peak physical condition, but they are expected to do all of these things whether they are able to compete or not. Furthermore, practice schedules and workouts do not end when the season is complete. It is important that collegiate athletes maintain their conditioning, so even when the season has ended athletes are obligated to continue training although, it might not be as intense as it would have been were the sport still in-season (Root, 2009).

One such conditioning program includes the incorporation of cross-training into the weekly workout regimen. This form of exercise "enhances aerobic fitness; it provides alternative exercises to do when injured; and it adds variety to prevent muscle imbalance and boredom"
Cross training is for all athletes, not just those with injuries, because there are a number of benefits that can be obtained by utilizing this particular form of exercise.

Swimming, cycling, rowing, skiing, and incline-walking all fall under the umbrella of cross-training, and these options add quite a bit of variety to the typical workout regime. This can be helpful in terms of enabling athletes who are recovering from injuries, to maintain their conditioning while still helping them to heal, but such exercising holds value for all athletes because it allows different muscle groups to be worked. Cycling works mainly the quads and lower body, while swimming is more concentrated on working the upper body (Cooper, 2010). In addition, workouts that utilize cross-training help to enhance flexibility, promote higher levels of oxygen intake, and can also offer athletes a fun form of cardio which breaks up the monotony of a workout regimen (Lebow & Averbuch, 1992). In many instances, “cross training options require low or even no impact; [and] they offer a welcome respite from the pounding of the pavement” (Lebow & Averbuch, 1992, p. 97). Having said that, it seems clear that this is a form of exercise that cross country coaches, in particular, would be foolish not to utilize, especially since cross training has been proven to help make you both a superior runner and a more well-rounded athlete (Lebow & Averbuch, 1992).

**Disadvantages and Stressors Associated with Being a Collegiate Athlete**

Collegiate athletes face more than just issues that revolve around their busy schedules, but a lack of unscheduled time is something that they encounter daily. The schedules of collegiate athletes tend to be “very tightly structured around classes, homework, study, practice, and athletic events. As a result, they do not have the same freedom with their schedules as the average student” (Puffer-Rothenberg & Thomas, 2000, p.131). Consequently, it is vital that these developing young adults establish a strategy that will allow them to deal with the unique
challenges, both athletic and academic, that they will encounter on a regular basis (Lu, Hsu, Chan, Cheen & Kao, 2012). The balancing act, which entails finding time for the demands that are placed on them as both students and athletes, is something that individuals competing at the collegiate level handle on a regular basis.

College athletes have stressors that are similar to other college students with the additional stressors, which result from being a part of their respective sports team. Things like juggling class, homework, and relationships both romantic and otherwise, are only one part of the story. Intense practices, workout regimes, pressure to perform well, competition amongst teammates for starting spots, having to travel long distances in order to compete, all play a role, and after a while they begin to take a toll on these individuals. It must also be noted “goal orientation plays an important role in a person’s interpretation and performance during competitive sports and it will affect their anxiety and confidence under such conditions” (Behzadi, Hamzei, Nori, & Salehian, 2011, p. 262). Therefore it is important that these collegiate athletes be monitored closely to ensure that the stress is not negatively impacting their school or athletic performance. Aside from the negative health impacts, a student-athlete may also have to deal with harmful psychosocial or learning outcomes, which could ultimately force them to resign from the team and or to sue the institution, so keeping an eye on these individuals is vital for universities and colleges as these are not ideal outcomes (Root, 2009).

Student athletes consistently list missing out on things in college, being negatively stereotyped by others, and having virtually no free time as being some of the biggest drawbacks to their team membership (Paule & Gilson, 2010). Studies conducted by Kihl, Richardson and Campisi (2008), Root (2009), and Behzadi et al., (2011) have shown that the high levels of stress that student-athletes encounter in their day-to-day lives, affect them deeply. Individuals in this
study who felt that their participation in sports caused them higher levels of daily stress, also felt that this stress caused their athletic performance to suffer, their exhaustion levels to rise, and led to a devaluation in their appreciation of sports (Lu et al., 2012). These persons felt that they had high expectations to live up to on the playing field and if they did not live up to them, they fixated on the mistakes that they had made which only served to increase their level of stress. According to Lu, et al., (2012), this behavior only served to make the athletes psych themselves out, causing them to become anxious about their performance in future games, and ultimately hindering their overall performance.

At times, “…negative treatment in the form of associative guilt, limited communication, a lack of support and public criticism and humiliation will be inflicted [on said athletes by] certain faculty, students, university and athletic administration, and the media” (Kihl et al., 2008, p. 285). Conversely, though, collegiate athletics provide “opportunities to meet and communicate with other people, to take different social roles, to learn particular social skills (such as tolerance and respect for others)… and [they provide an] experience of emotions that are not available in the rest of life” (Bailey, 2006, p. 397).

The rigorous demands, both physical and academic, which are placed on this specific group of young adults at colleges and universities across the United States, are extensive. A great many of the advantages and disadvantages which these individuals are afforded, are a direct result of the long workouts, arduous practices, and high-intensity competitions that have become part of their daily routines, but there are also other advantages and disadvantages which result from the environments which these student-athletes reside and interact. Puffer-Rothenberg and Thomas (2000), Gayles, and Hu (2009), and Kihl, Richardson, and Campisi (2008) all lend credibility to such an argument through their respective studies.
**Academic Advantages and Disadvantages**

As far as their academic careers go, collegiate athletes are also not supposed to lose sight of the fact that they are students first and athletes second. According to Ridpath (2012), “many prospective student athletes, who meet NCAA standards for competitive eligibility, often still do not meet admission standards for a particular university” (p. 258), and as such are reliant upon the additional services that are afforded to them as NCAA athletes. Universities need to keep athletes eligible to compete, and so a lot of emphasis is placed on their academic performance and attendance. Collegiate-athletes have access to tutors, extra study sessions, study skills and organization workshops, and much more, if they are willing to take it upon themselves to ask for the extra assistance that they need. The NCAA places a great deal of value on their athletes’ successes in the classroom, as this emphasizes their overall support of the attainment of higher education. Furthermore, the NCAA has made it clear that it will do everything in its power to help collegiate athletes meet both their academic and athletic goals as they complete their college years (NCAA, 2013). In addition, importance is placed on class attendance and athletic administrators have made it a priority to minimize the amount of classes that collegiate athletes miss (Ayers et al., 2012).

Additional services can be a positive tool for collegiate athletes to utilize, but they can also cause some issues. For example, individuals such as coaches, counselors, and faculty must be aware of the unique life stressors which collegiate athletes are forced to deal with. They must also ensure that there are specific programs offered to said athletes, which help them to deal with all of their life and sport-related stressors, so that they are better able to handle such pressures, and are then less inclined to burnout and give up athletics altogether (Etzel, 2009). While there are many tools readily available for collegiate athletes to use, oftentimes they are not taken full
advantage of because the faculty and coaching staff are unaware that these individuals are struggling or in need of extra help.

Another topic of concern for collegiate athletes is that of academic corruption or academic dishonesty. This includes things such as plagiarism, signing the attendance sheet for someone not actually in attendance, cheating, or any other form of behavior that takes place in the academic world wherein an individual represents them falsely. Kihl et al., (2008), found that academic dishonesty on the part of a few individuals belonging to a collegiate team had severe repercussions for all members of that particular team. Their research also suggested “…student athletes suffer three main consequences (negative treatment, sanctions, and a sense of loss) that lead to various harmful outcomes (e.g., distrust, embarrassment, dysfunctional relationships, stakeholder separation, anger, stress, and conflict)” (Kihl, et al., 2008, p. 273). Furthermore, the study suggested that athletes who are not guilty of the academic dishonesty often face consequences, but who find themselves guilty based solely on their association to the offending team.

According to Engstrom and Sedlacek (1991), collegiate athletes encounter unique pressures to succeed both in the classroom and on the playing field. Biases from both faculty members and fellow students may encourage collegiate athletes to participate in such dishonest behaviors. Knowing that there is a significant amount of money and pride at stake when it comes to collegiate athletics (Baxter et al., 1996, p. 51) may be another reason why collegiate athletes do not always abstain from illicit and academically inappropriate behaviors. In no way does this validate such dishonest behavior, but these factors should certainly be taken into account.
Advantages Associated with Collegiate Athletics

While there are some drawbacks to being a collegiate athlete, students still try out for these teams, get recruited, and ultimately make the decision to be a part of something bigger than themselves during their college years. There do appear to be a number of hindering factors in being a student-athlete, but there are several positives as well. Students come to college and very quickly become a part of a close-knit group. This seems only logical, as team membership affects individuals deeply and has an impact on the performance of the group, as well (Behzadi et al., 2011). In addition, the practice schedules and team bonding exercises, enable individuals to develop close friendships much more quickly than the average college student, thus making the transition from high school to college much easier, as well.

In addition, collegiate athletes experience a social standing that is somewhat unique. They are recognized by their peers and communities as being dedicated to their respective sports, and also for serving—as to some extent—as representatives of their respective institutions. The athleticism these individuals possess positively improves their own self-perceptions and increases their social standing among peers (Bailey, 2006). Furthermore, collegiate athletes are afforded a certain level of respect and awe, since people understand that the amount of discipline and dedication needed in order to call oneself a collegiate athlete is more than many would be willing to give or commit. Perhaps it is for that reason that educational institutions cater to the needs of their collegiate athletes, and regard these individuals as being the heart and soul of the establishments that they represent (Jansevan-Resburg, Surjlal & Dhurup, 2011).

When student athletes are interviewed they consistently include team membership, academic advantages, improved time management skills, scholarships, and the opportunity to
travel among the benefits of being a student-athlete at the collegiate level (Paule & Gilson, 2010). According to Chen, Snyder, and Magner (2012), collegiate athletes tend to be of the opinion that participation in sports has more factors that are positive in nature, than negative. That being said, the argument could very easily be made that the positive nature in which collegiate athletes appear to view their athletic standing, does a lot for the retention rate that colleges and universities appear to have with their athletics participants.

**The Role of Gender in Collegiate Athletics**

Female participation in sports is nothing new in our society. “Too often historians present women’s sporting experiences as if they were rooted only in modern society and became increasingly more complex and common” (Struna, 2003, p. 105), and that simply is not the case. Over time, research found that as the times changed and people became more progressive in their beliefs. In reality, female participation in sports and athletic events has occurred informally for decades. Sports “became one of an array of endeavors wherein women sought to discover their physical, social, and political potential” (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998, p. 63) as it became more acceptable, in the eyes of society for them to do so. And as time went on, the opportunities afforded to women in the athletic world grew:

- Triathlons, marathons, soccer, aerobics, weightlifting, rugby, skiing, two professional basketball leagues…., athletic clubs, and even cheerleading are among the many sports [now] available to women, none of which existed a century ago and few of which existed a generation earlier. (Struna, 2003, p. 110)

This was significant, as it served to illustrate the manner in which women welcomed the idea of competing in sports which had, for years, been dominated by males and males alone.
Similar strides were made in the world of collegiate athletics, starting in the 1970’s, with the passage of Title IX (The Living Law, 2013). Title IX is legislation that states “[no] person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance” (as cited in The Living Law, 2013). This legislation was intended to ensure that no person was excluded from obtaining an education or from participating in education related programs, such as athletics, on the basis of their gender. However, as time has gone on, “…relative to progress made since Title IX, the connection between the male power structure and the NCAA’s documentable resistance to equity appears to have translated into very real discrepancies on college campuses” (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998, p. 125). The allotment of scholarship funds, budget dollars, and recruiting monies given to female sports, as compared to male sports is not as equally split as it truly ought to be (Sack & Staurowsky, 1998). A fear, however, is that Title IX is not providing more female athletes with an opportunity to compete on the college stage, and that it is merely limiting the number of male athletes that are permitted to compete (Gavora, 2002). It seems clear that while a great deal of progress has been made concerning the role of gender in collegiate athletics, there is still plenty of room for improvement.

Female Involvement in Collegiate Cross-Country Running

While Title IX provided females with a greater opportunity to participate in collegiate sports, it failed to provide coaches and educators with an adequate understanding of the needs that are specific to female athletes (Zawila et al., 2003). Female cross-country runners at the collegiate level encounter a number of experiences unique to their specific sport. Adapting to the intense workout regimes and practice schedules can be difficult, and female athletes specifically
can have difficulty maintaining levels of good health as a result of the female athlete triad. Very little information exists regarding the experiences of female cross-country runners, making this study that much more valuable in the long run.

**Summary of Chapter**

This chapter focused on the research that already exists concerning both collegiate athletics, and female involvement in sports. The insights that other scholars and researchers had to share on these subjects were integral in establishing a historical context for the beliefs that abound in today’s society. The topics covered, included the time commitment, expectations, stressors associated with being a collegiate athlete, academic advantages and disadvantages, the role of gender in collegiate athletics, and female involvement in collegiate cross country running. A number of studies were utilized in order to prove the assertions made in each subsection to be well-founded and credible, and ultimately to help indicate that the results that will be generated in the study that follows have not been duplicated or replicated in any study that I was able to find in existence already.

As stated earlier, very little data is already in existence concerning the perceptions that collegiate athletes, themselves, have about their experiences. Furthermore, there is even less literature in circulation concerning the perceptions that female athletes have about their collegiate experiences. The majority of the information readily available which concerns female cross-country athletes, specifically, has to do with the female athlete triad of health issues. My study then, is extremely important as it holds the potential to provide a number of new insights and discoveries concerning the female athlete experience at the collegiate level. By providing a look into the life of female cross-country runners, this study serves to appropriately reinforce the information already in existence, draw attention to any discrepancies or new information, and
also to provide these female athletes with an opportunity to reflect on their collegiate careers and the perceptions they have concerning those specific years of competition.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

It is clear, from the review of literature, that there are some distinct advantages and disadvantages associated with being an athlete at the collegiate level. My research study dealt specifically with these issues in regards to female cross-country runners. Its main aim was to cover aspects of collegiate cross-country running that female athletes tend to encounter which are less wellness-based, and more educationally and socially based in nature.

The questions I investigated and sought to answer included:

1. What are the perceived academic advantages and disadvantages associated with being an athlete for a University/College?
2. Why do female cross-country runners continue to participate during their college years?

Methodology

The method of data collection being utilized for this study was qualitative. As such, an inductive approach coupled with an emphasis on words instead of numbers was the focus (Maxwell, 2005). The data generated through qualitative research is thorough and allows for thick descriptions of people, places, and experiences. In order to deeply understand the collegiate experiences of female cross-country runners, qualitative research methods including interviews were utilized.

Qualitative research encompasses many different approaches, but the focus of this study was the phenomenological approach to qualitative research. Phenomenology “focuses on descriptions of how people experience and how they perceive their experience of the phenomena under study” (Glesne, 1999, p. 7). Because I wanted to make sure that these athletes were able to reflect on their experiences and to provide me with some insights based on their standing as
collegiate athletes, I felt that phenomenology was the obvious choice in terms of approaches to qualitative research.

**Context**

The focus of this study was on the experience of female athletes participating in collegiate cross-country programs at Division I institutions in Northwest Ohio. For those not familiar with cross-country, it is a sport, which generally takes place in the late summer and autumn. Athletes race across various types of terrain, encountering hills, shallow ravines, wooded areas, and grassy stretches along the way. At the collegiate level, men generally race distances of 8 kilometers, while females race shorter distances of 5 kilometers.

The female athletes who agreed to participate in this study are long distance runners first and foremost. Their first season of the year is that of cross-country in the fall, but they also participate in indoor and outdoor track seasons that take place during the winter and spring. These additional seasons help runners to maintain peak physical condition.

**Participants**

To keep the scope of this study somewhat narrow, a set of criteria was utilized to purposefully select participants which included: being over 18 years of age and a female currently enrolled in and competing at a university with a Division I designation. In addition, participants needed to be returning athletes, having already completed a full year of competition for their respective school as members of the cross-country/track team. The selection of female athlete participants for this study was done intentionally so as to truly illustrate the experiences that these female cross-country runners had had at their specific educational institution.

Six females volunteered to participate in the study, all of which came from fairly similar socio-economic backgrounds of middle or upper-middle class. They were not all in the same
year of college, but all of them had completed at least two years of collegiate running. All six were Caucasian and possessed the slim yet muscular build, which is common in female runners. Five of the women had roots in Ohio or Michigan, while one was originally from the West Coast. Pseudonyms were utilized in order to promote confidentiality, and the participants were given the opportunity to select their own alias. Below are the names they selected and corresponding descriptions of each of these six women:

Jordan Pentz: A fun-loving and upbeat Ohioan of medium height, with brown hair, a quiet personality, and a realistic outlook on life.

Jenny Katch: A short, curly-haired blonde, full of compassion and a willingness to help others. Also from Ohio.

Patty Torbet: A tall, good-natured blonde from the West Coast with a no-nonsense persona.

Margaret Wilson: A tall, goal-oriented Ohioan with a fierce competitive streak, blonde hair, and a cheerful disposition.

Kelly Stane: A short, brown-haired Ohioan with a driven nature and an intense desire to succeed.

Holly Bumble: A black haired, easy-going Michigander of medium height, with a fairly quiet yet caring personality, and an artistic streak.

Knowing full-well, just how busy the life of a college student can be, the individuals who gave up some of their time to help further the research of this study received some heartfelt gratitude as well as some compensation. This was extremely important to do, especially since the vast majority of a collegiate athlete’s time is not their own. The fact that these women willingly opted to give up some of this extremely valuable commodity in order to participate in this study,
meant that they deserved to be recognized and formally thanked for their assistance. Each participant received a handwritten thank you note along with a Starbucks gift card as a form of appreciation.

Data Sources and Collection

There are three main data sources that were used to inform the understanding of the phenomenon of cross-country running. These include the interview, class schedule, and practice observations. Each will be explained in detail.

Structured interviews. Structured interviews protocols were developed to deeply understand the unique aspects of the college experiences (Fontana & Frey, 1994). Interviews are an invaluable tool for researchers to utilize as they “… can provide additional information that was missed in observation, and [they] can be used to check the accuracy of [your] observations” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 94). Furthermore, Glesne (1999) has indicated that interviews provide researchers with an outlet to discover the “opinions, perceptions, and attitudes toward some topic [which] exist among a particular group of people” (p.69). Thus the interview was a cornerstone data source for this study.

Based on the setup and time constraints associated with this study, the structured interview protocol seemed like the wisest course of action. Participants were asked questions from an approved list, and then prompted to elaborate when incomplete or unclear responses were initially provided. Later on, the interviews were transcribed and sent back to the participants so as to ensure that they had answered the questions as completely as possible, and that they approved of how they had portrayed themselves. By allowing the participants to revisit the responses that they had initially given, they were afforded an opportunity to elaborate and provide more detail, where appropriate, and also to reflect on the meaning of their experiences.
The interview questions (Appendix I) created were open-ended in nature so that the interviewee was able to more easily reconstruct and inform the interviewer of her own experiences.

**Class schedule.** The participants were asked to provide a breakdown of a typical in-season day. In order to accomplish this, each participant was given a blank schedule that had each hour of a single day blocked out. They were then asked to fill out the schedule for a typical in-season day. They indicated what time they woke up, ate their meals, attended class, worked out, attended practice, studied, and went to sleep. This was intended to illustrate just how busy these women are on a regular basis. According to Berg (2004), being aware of all the activities that participants are involved in can be valuable to your study, as said involvement may impact the perceptions and opinions that are generated about specific topics.

**Observation of practice.** The final step that I took in terms of gathering information for this study was to observe a practice. Maxwell (2005), states “observation often provides a direct and powerful way of learning about people’s behavior and the context in which this occurs” (p. 94). Maxwell goes on to state “…observation can enable you to draw inferences from [someone’s] perspective that you couldn’t obtain by relying exclusively on interview data” (p. 94). This data source allowed me to see the athletes interacting with each other. It allowed me to witness the close bond that many of the females shared with their teammates, and also permitted me to see how sharing the title of collegiate athlete had helped to forge strong relationships among these females and their teammates.

**Data Analysis**

The majority of the data collected during this study was done so through the administration of interviews. Once all of the interviews had been administered, the questions and
responses were immediately transcribed so that the data could more easily be assessed. The study facilitator then began to read and re-read the interviews so that she could begin to look for codes. The coding process was fairly intricate, but for the sake of validity it was an extremely important process to employ (Garrison, Cleveland-Innes, Koole & Kappelman, 2006). Once all of the interviews had been transcribed, the interviewer read over them several times. The first time, interviews were read in an effort to understand what the participants really felt their own experiences had been like. The second time interviews were read, common themes were underlined with an assigned color. Specific illustrations of those themes were then noted whenever they appeared in said interviews. This process allowed stark similarities and differences in participant responses to be more easily located and identified (Holton, 2007). It also allowed for several main ideas, referred to as codes, to be established. The evidence presented in participant responses, which either confirmed or disaffirmed these codes were then considered to be assertions of those codes, or warrants. The interview transcripts were reviewed a number of times so as to ensure that all of the assertions had been located, and ultimately the codes that had been established were reviewed and only the ones with strong evidence were selected to be used in this study (Erickson, 1986).

By coding the information, it was much simpler for me to see if there were any common themes that existed among my survey population. Based on my own prior knowledge of the topic, I felt somewhat safe in hypothesizing that time management, and having an extremely full schedule were themes that might be illustrated during the study. I knew that I had found the answers to my research questions when the data being offered up from my participants started to get repetitive. Research suggests that when the same findings are generated in more than one
interview, that those findings then are more reliable and accurate in terms of whatever it is that they are asserting to be true (Erickson, 1986).

One such code that appeared during this process, had to do with time management and the importance of organization. All six of the participants indicated in some way that their busy schedules did not allow for a great deal of free time, and as a result they had to be as efficient as possible with the time that they did have. As such, being organized was vital to their academic success. Jenny indicated that using a daily planner had really helped her, because it provided her with a place to write all of her obligations down. She stated that “if it’s not written down, it doesn’t happen.” Jordan elaborated on the concept of time management, stating “you can’t procrastinate, and if you do, it catches up with you fast”. Patty explained that being a part of a team “…forces you to be a good person and take care of your stuff.” Margaret, Holly, and Kelly also backed up this code with statements of their own. Such statements served as warrants and assertions, or evidence in favor of this particular code.

Data Reliability

Once the interviews had been conducted and transcribed, a copy was sent to each participant so that they could read over their responses and approve of the way that they had portrayed themselves. According to Glesne (1999), this form of member checking is vital, so that the research participants are able to make sure that their ideas and contributions are being represented as accurately as possible. Such measures also grant study participants an opportunity to add in any other information that they might have omitted during the initial interview. These steps are intended to improve the validity of the research which was conducted, as much as possible. It is important, however, not to lose sight of the fact that “validity is a goal rather than a
product; it is never something that can be proven or taken for granted” (Maxwell, 2005, p.105). As such, there is still a slight margin for error.

**Triangulation.** Utilizing all of this information in the triangulation of data was something that had to take place in order to make sure that the information being assessed was as accurate and as valid as possible. Glesne (2009) defines triangulation as the “practice of relying on multiple [research] methods” (p. 31). For this particular study, the triangulation revolved around the coded responses of the interview questions, the daily schedules of the athletes, and the first-hand observation of practice. For the purposes of this study, the use of several different research methods were extremely important because such variety helped to ensure that the results garnered were not limited in bias or scope, like they very well could have been if only one research strategy had been employed (Maxwell, 2005).

**Limitations**

The study followed qualitative methods research protocols. However, it was somewhat limited in scope because only six female athletes were interviewed. Had my population sample been larger, the data generated probably would have been a bit more reliable as there would have been more participants available to validate assertions and main ideas by mentioning and emphasizing similar aspects of their experiences. In addition, all of the athletes I talked to attended the same Division I institution, so it is hard to say whether their experiences were a true representation of life as a female runner in the Midwest, or if they merely reflected their experiences at that particular school or area of the state. Guba and Lincoln (1989), argue that this form of purposeful selection is for the best, though, as it ensures that the participants provide an accurate representation of the group intended to be studied.
The final limitation is my relationship with the participants, which could also be considered a strength of my research study. I knew all of the athletes that I interviewed, prior to conducting any research. I had attended a number of their races before and was on a first name basis with most, if not all, of them prior to doing the interviews. On one hand, I feel that this is a limitation because it could have prevented the participants from being as brutally honest about some of their experiences as they might have been, had they been talking to a complete stranger who they knew that they would never see again. However, Glesne (1999) states that if “a large amount of time is spent with your research participants, they less readily feign behavior or feel the need to do so; moreover, they are more likely to be frank and comprehensive about what they tell you” (p.151), which lends credit to the idea that my familiarity with my research subjects/participants was actually for the best.

**Summary of Chapter**

This study dealt strictly with female athletes at the collegiate level who have returned to continue running at their respective Division I schools. It aimed to uncover the advantages and disadvantages that such students feel are a result of their standing as athletes at the institutions they attend. Furthermore, it sought to accomplish this through the implementation of interviews, the observation of practices, and the validation of athlete schedules.
CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS

The research generated in this study was able to provide the investigator with a better understanding of what the college experience has been like for female cross-country runners at Division I schools in Northwestern Ohio. By utilizing interviews, class schedules, and the observation of a practice, data were generated to answer the following research questions: 1) What are the academic advantages and disadvantages associated with being an athlete for a University/College? 2) Why do female cross-country runners continue to participate during their college years? Said questions were intended to evaluate, to some degree, the importance that female runners place on the higher education that college affords them.

In the pages that follow, short vignettes about each of the six study participants are presented. These vignettes present data which were garnered through a combination of the interviews, daily schedule breakdowns, and the observation of practice that were conducted and are intended to give the reader a better understanding of who these women are, what their life goals and ambitions are, as well as the level of importance that they place on their studies and team membership. Once all of the narratives have been presented, a brief synopsis is provided in order to highlight the main ideas and recurring themes, which came up as I talked to these women.

Jordan Pentz

When I sat down with Jordan Pentz, one of the first things I noticed about her was her efficient yet extremely soft-spoken manner. As we spoke about her collegiate experiences, her responses were short and to the point, but they were thorough enough to answer every single aspect of the question. As an individual who had recently completed her third year of college, Jordan had no misconceptions about the work that being a collegiate athlete entailed. She quickly
pointed out that being a collegiate athlete was something which had provided her with the opportunity to get a higher education, that she might not otherwise have had access to. The bar had been set high with Jordan’s ambition of one day becoming a physical therapist, but her grade point average of a 4.0 served as a clear indication that she truly understood the importance that should be placed on performing well in the classroom. At one point in the conversation, Jordan said, “If I had to quit the team to do what I need to do for my whole future, than I would do it. But the whole athletics part is [something that] just helped pay for school. It’s a bonus,” thus illustrating the fact that her main focus was academic, rather than athletic, in scope.

Jordan went on to explain, during the course of our interview, that being a collegiate athlete had impacted her education in a number of ways. She emphasized how important it was for her to be efficient with her time, mainly because most of her time did not belong to her. A typical day in her life, as was shown by her schedule breakdown, indicated that while she was awake during the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 11:00 p.m., very little time was not already scheduled out. Between meals, classes, workouts and practices, Jordan’s days were fairly booked, and as a result, studying was something that had to take place whenever she had a free moment. This phenomenon was expounded upon when she stated, “I probably get at least two or three hours of studying in each day, and if I need more I just stay up late because I have a little bit more flexibility in my schedule at night.”

Also touched on during the course of our interview, was the fact that Jordan felt her standing as a collegiate athlete had improved her study skills as it had forced her to get better at time management. “You just plan out the week so you know when you can study and do whatever else you need to do, and you just can’t procrastinate,” Jordan stated. She made it clear,
as our talk came to an end, that the time constraints were just something that went along with being a collegiate athlete. She stated:

There really is not a lot of time, and you might not have the social life you want to, but that’s just how it is. …I feel like we get taken care of. And…it’s like, you come in and you don’t have to worry about making friends, [because] you’ve got 40 of them. And…if there is a problem, there’s so many people that are there to help you. You don’t have to go searching for anybody…so yeah, I would say there’s a lot of benefits to it.

Therefore, Jordan explained that she felt like the benefits far outweighed the negatives associated with being a collegiate runner.

**Jenny Katch**

Jenny Katch sat down to interview with me after the last practice of the season had been conducted. Not having been selected to compete at the upcoming conference-level track meet, she and several of her teammates had shown up that morning to watch and cheer for the young ladies who actually would be representing their school at that particular competition. Optimism and positivity radiated from her cheerful face, as spoke about her experiences as a collegiate athlete.

Just finished with her second year of college, Jenny had a number of insights to share about being a collegiate runner. Similar to Jordan, her schedule indicated that she was awake during the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 11:00 p.m., but unlike her teammate, Jenny’s schedule looked to be a little less full. Workouts, classes, practices, and meals were all scheduled out, but she appeared to have more time available in her day for studying and unwinding. When asked specifically about that, Jenny indicated that she felt this might have something to do with the fact
that she was only a sophomore and as such, was not taking as many major-centered classes as her older teammate most likely had been.

Jenny indicated that she had come from a fairly large city, originally, and as such was used to the noise and crowds. The transition from high school to college was not something that had been extremely difficult for her to deal with, as both environments were fairly similar. She explained that her life’s goal was to become an anesthesiologist, and as such she would only be eligible to run for four years because she would have to attend nursing school after that. She made sure to bring up the fact that part of the reason she had opted to join this specific running team had to do with the fact that her major would not have been feasible, due to her standing as an athlete, at a number of other universities. Keeping that in mind, she knew that the nursing program would be fairly competitive in nature, Jenny also discussed how she placed quite a bit of importance on performing well in her classes. In terms of studying she stated that in any given week she studied “…at least 14 hours or so, outside of class.” She went on to explain how little that truly was. “That’s like an hour before class and an hour at night, and that’s lowballing it. I probably study a couple hours at night, and an hour in the morning,” she said.

Jenny made it clear that she saw the value in performing well in school, but when asked if she classified herself as being more athletically or academically oriented, she selected the former without any hesitation. She explained that she had discussed this with some of her teammates before and that “…we always say it’s about 70% athletic and 30% school, just because….I live with my teammates and school is kinda just what everyone does on the side.” Jenny went on to say that, “…school [sometimes] seems like the hobby, and it seems like a lot of the time we’re here to run.”
Even with that said, Miss Katch made sure to reinforce the idea that she was happy with the decision that she had made to run at the collegiate level. “I think you are who you hang out with,” she said, “[and] I think hanging out with dedicated people, or at least people who have a passion for something is good.” She sat thoughtfully for a moment, and then left me with the following statement to reflect upon: “I give up free time and traveling home for Easter [and some other holidays]…and yeah, I miss some things, but I know this is what I want to be doing.”

Patty Torbet

Patty Torbet was wearing flowery shorts when she answered the door and warmly welcomed me into her apartment. Not from the Midwest originally, but rather the West Coast, Patty explained that she felt her collegiate experience had been a bit unique because she had been forced to transition to an entirely new way of life, on top of being a collegiate athlete. Having just completed her sophomore year of college, Patty thought back to her first days on campus and explained that “…it took the entirety of freshman year to get used to the new sense of culture and to adapt to being on different time schedules than my parents.” She then grinned sheepishly and laughed, as she went on, “Getting over the fact of feeling like ‘oh my god, I’m so far away!’ was the hardest thing, but now I feel like when I go home I’m thinking ‘oh my god, I’m so far from my friends!’”

Coming from so far away to be a part of a Midwestern cross country team, it only made sense that Patty would have put a lot of thought into the college selection process. She explained first and foremost that the education she was afforded due to running competitively at her respective Division I university was extremely important to her. The main question that had run through her head during this process was “how can I use running to my fullest advantage, you know, to get an education that I wouldn’t normally be able to get?” A number of schools had
been looked at, but Patty explained that, “[Ultimately,] I was…depending on the [running] scholarship to get a good education,” She continued, saying, “…[and if I wasn’t competing here] I’d probably be at a community college or doing something else.”

As we assessed her schedule, one of the things that stood out most to me was that Patty did not seem to be too taxed class-wise during a typical day. Awake between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 12:30 a.m., she only had one class scheduled in-between meals, practice, cross training and studying, which all appeared to be fairly unchanging in terms of when they were taking place. “Everything is pretty routine and scheduled because you have to be ready for practice at 2:30 [p.m.] every day,” Patty explained.

Going out of her way to mention the fact that she had a fifth year of eligibility, Patty made sure to acknowledge the way that she was not really pushing herself too hard academically. Elaborating further, she discussed how her major of marketing and business had been one that had been declared later on in her collegiate career. This, as she put it, was because, “[initially] I just wanted a school that had a lot of options and a good running program, and I figured I’d get the rest of it all figured out later.” Studying, however, was something that Patty explained was necessary. She also indicated it was something that she went out of her way to make time for, saying, “I probably do homework maybe like 2 or 3 hours a day.”

Despite the value that Miss Torbet made sure to indicate that she saw in the education that she was being afforded as a collegiate athlete, she made it clear that her motivation was not academic in scope. Her standing as an athlete, and the concept of belonging to a team, were more along the lines of where she felt that her inspiration sprang from. “I want to be able to run and I want to do well for the team,” Patty explained. “You have a commitment to your team,”
she continued, “…and you’re held to high expectations, and it just sort of forces you to be a good person and to take care of your stuff.”

In terms of the future, Patty replied simply that while she was not really sure what she was going to do with her life, she felt that “…it would be cool to work with brands that sponsor running, or are involved at marathon expos or something like that.” She indicated that remaining involved with running in some capacity would be just fine with her, as she saw a number of benefits associated with the decision that she had made to be a collegiate runner. And as our interview drew to a close, Patty smiled and explained how being a part of the team had really helped her to feel like she fit in. “The teammates that you have are like your go-to people,” she stated matter-of-factly, “…you’re always together, and it gives you a really good sense of family and security.”

**Holly Bumble & Margaret Wilson**

Holly Bumble, had just completed her fourth year of collegiate athletics, and Margaret Wilson, had just completed her third, when I asked them about participating in this study. Both were extremely interested in the research that I was intent on conducting, and as soon as they heard about the study, they made it clear that they would be more than willing to help. However, the day I showed up to interview them was extremely warm and I found myself asking my questions in a most peculiar area. Holly and Margaret answered each and every question that I had for them while they laid out in the middle of campus, in order to catch some rays and make the most of their off-week. And as helpful as the two of them were, it must be noted that this was a bit unusual because whereas this interview was jointly conducted, all of the others I completed were individual in nature. Since the interviews for these two participants were conducted jointly, I opted to present their responses and insights together, as well.
One of the first things that we did was to take a look at the schedules that each of these women kept while in season. Margaret’s appeared to mirror the schedules of her fellow teammates’, as it indicated that she was awake between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 11:00 p.m. During that time she balanced two classes with her morning cross-training, afternoon practice, meals and study time. Holly’s schedule was also similar to her teammates’ in that she balanced three classes each day with cross-training, practice, meals, and studying. Hers was a bit different in terms of the hours that she kept though, as she was awake between the hours of 6:30 a.m. and 1:00 a.m., and as such did not get as much sleep as the other females who were interviewed.

When asked about the educational opportunity that being a collegiate runner had provided, Holly spoke up first. “I’ve grown up loving running so much, and I am incredibly happy to be doing it in college,” she began, “…but both of my parents are teachers so they’re kind of exemplary reminders of the fact that you have to get a good education.” She paused for a moment and then said, “Running is important, [but it’s important] because it is helping to pay for school.” Margaret echoed these sentiments, and emphasized the way that she believed that the education she was getting would be helping her out later on in life.

In terms of their future goals, Holly and Margaret both indicated that they hoped to be a part of the medical/wellness world. Holly explained that she was wished to pursue a career in Worksite Wellness and was accomplishing this in the form of an Individualized Studies major. “I have a minor in business, and a minor in public health, and a small focus in sign language, “she stated, “so I put those classes together and when I graduate I will have a degree in individualized studies focusing on Worksite Wellness.” Margaret, on the other hand, was not as sure what direction she wanted to go in career-wise, but she explained to me that she was “on the pre-occupational therapy route [because] with an exercise science degree it’s very flexible.”
said, “I can go into physical therapy, exercise physiology, kinesiology, [or] anything like that…. [and it’s great because] I love being around athletes and fitness.”

With such ambitions, the ladies made it clear that their studies were important to them. Margaret indicated that her future in occupational therapy would require her to have a doctorate, so it was important for her not to slack when it came to her classwork. That said, she explained that she studied “probably around three or so hours a night,” while Holly said that she studied “about two or three hours each day.” Holly also mentioned that making the best use of her time was vital, so when in season and traveling, “I try to get as much studying done as I can in the hotel rooms for away meets.”

Even having acknowledged that their academic careers were not to be taken lightly, both Holly and Margaret did not feel that their motivation was rooted primarily in their classroom performance. Holly was a bit torn on the subject, and stated, “it’s hard, because I feel like I’m split right down the middle.” She thought for a moment, and then went more into detail, as she said, “I feel like I tend to go back and forth. When there’s a meet coming up I tend to sway that way, and when there’s a test coming up I tend to lean that way.” Conversely, Margaret did not have to think for very long at all before chiming in with why she felt she was more athletically motivated. “When I think about college,” she began, “the first thing I think about is athletics. [My motivation] is all about how I want to do, and what I want to accomplish with running …. and it’s just like school is something that is happening.” Margaret paused to explain how strange she knew that that must sound, but then confirmed her stance by stating “I have a 3.5 [grade point average]….and I mean, obviously it could be better, but I’m happy with that. And things have worked out so far.”
We wrapped up the interview with some reflection on how happy these women were with the decision that they had made to be a part of a cross country team during their college years. Holly answered first, saying simply, “it has been one of the best decisions I’ve ever made … I have traveled to countless places that I would have never experienced had I not been a collegiate runner.” She continued, “I developed some incredible bonds with many of my teammates, [and] being a student athlete year-round has also taught me to develop great time-management skills.” Margaret nodded her agreement, and then explained her own thoughts on the subject. “Just like with anything else, there are positives and negatives associated with it, but overall, the benefits overshadow it, [especially] with the experiences you get with traveling and meeting people, and challenging yourself;” she said. It was at this point that Margaret laughed, and in a very reassuring manner explained how cheesy she knew that sounded, but that she meant every single word.

**Kelly Stane**

Kelly Stane graciously agreed to be the sixth and final participant in this study. Similar to Holly, she indicated that she had recently completed her fourth year of collegiate running, and much like her teammate, Patty, she also explained that she would be completing a fifth year of classes due to an injury-induced extension of eligibility which would also allow her to fulfill her four full years of collegiate competition. Other similarities were few and far between for the remainder of the interview, a fact that was illustrated by Kelly’s initial thoughts on why she had chosen to go to school at her respective Division I institution. “My decision to be a part of this team was not necessarily impacted by the school itself,” she began. “I wanted to go to a school where I would be able to go far with running. The education I’m getting here is just an added bonus.” At this point, Kelly explained that she had had several full-ride scholarship offers from
Division I schools extended to her during her college selection process, and that ultimately her decision to attend this particular school had more to do with the athletic reputation of the running program, than the academic reputation of the university.

Miss Stane’s schedule was nothing out of the ordinary. On any given day she was awake between the hours of 8:30 a.m. and 11:00 p.m., and she also found herself balancing two classes with practice, workouts, meals, and study time. Where she differed from her teammate counterparts, however, was in her study habits, which appeared to have become less and less of a priority as she had progressed through her schooling. “During freshman and sophomore year I studied more,” Kelly began. “Back then, I probably studied about seven to ten hours a week, at least. But now that I know more of what to expect with my classes it’s less. I’d say now, it’s closer to five or seven hours a week.” This was inconsistent with the study habits described by her teammates who had indicated that they spent a significant period of time studying each week.

Such a discrepancy made sense, though, when Kelly explained her future plans and life goals. While she indicated that she was majoring in recreational therapy, and that her ultimate goal was to get her Master Degree in recreational administration, she also indicated that this was not something that she felt absolutely needed to happen right away. Her true hope was “to compete on a professional level…maybe for triathlons.” Kelly continued, stating, “I’d like to gain sponsorship so that I could just focus on training. My degree and career can wait, but I need to do this while I’m young.”

It goes without saying then that Kelly’s motivation was not academically based. “I’m definitely athletically motivated,” she said with a laugh. “The running community, the healthy lifestyle that it promotes, and the way athletics encourages you to push yourself physically, are all things that I love.” Kelly went on to explain that there was not a huge window of time or
opportunity for her to pursue a professional running career. She stressed that her love of competition was helping to motivate her to follow her dream. She elaborated a bit more on the subject, saying, “I’m only going to be young for so long. A career is something that can be had whenever, but I love what I’m doing and I have a supportive family, so I think that at least attempting this is something that I have to do.”

The final topic Kelly and I discussed had to do with her thoughts on being a collegiate athlete. “I’m a part of the best female team on campus,” she began, “so sometimes we get stereotyped as male athletes, and that’s hard. But there are people who understand the dedication and hard work that we’ve put into this, which makes it worth it.” Kelly expounded on the merits of being a collegiate athlete, saying “being an athlete helped me to adapt to new situations, people, and environments. I had to learn how to deal with people that I liked, and people that I didn’t, and these are skills that will be helpful when I eventually do enter the real world.”

**Discussion of Themes**

The above vignettes were employed in an effort to help the reader gain a more accurate understanding of what it takes to be a collegiate athlete. More specifically, they were intended to put a name to the athletic persona which accompanied these stories, as a means to assist the reader in relating a bit more to the study participants. Special attention was paid, throughout the course of these vignettes to the educational opportunities that these ladies felt athletics had afforded them, to their schedules and study habits, to their future goals, the source of their motivation, and their thoughts about their own participation in collegiate athletics. The interview process illustrated a number of similarities, which existed between the six female athletes, and the collegiate experiences that they had had. While all of their experiences had not been the same, there were enough commonalities to make some generalized statements. These statements
help to summarize and streamline the information presented in the vignettes as far as specific topics are concerned and they are listed below.

**Educational opportunities.** While all of the female athletes interviewed may not have selected their particular Division I University for the higher education that it provided, all of them recognized the fact that the education that they were receiving was something that was extremely valuable. Holly, Patty, and Jordan, in particular, indicated that they truly valued the educational opportunity that collegiate running had provided them. Jordan explained that, “if it wasn’t for the education I am receiving here, there would be no point…” Patty expressed similar thoughts, stating, “if it wasn’t for the scholarship that running has gotten me, I wouldn’t be here getting the education that I am getting now.” Holly also mentioned the importance of the education she had been afforded, stating “Running in college has been a great experience and it has allowed me an opportunity that I might not have [otherwise] had to get a great education”. In several instances these women made sure to mention that without the financial aid that they received as athletes, they would not be able to afford an education at a University with a Division I designation. They also indicated that community college would have been more of the route that they would have followed in terms of getting a college degree, were it not for collegiate athletics.

**Schedules.** Between classes, morning workouts, afternoon practices, meals, and studying, female cross country runners at the collegiate level do not possess a lot of free time. Their days are essentially blocked out for them, from the moment that they wake up until the moment that they go to sleep. As a result, both Jenny and Jordan made a point to emphasize the importance that maintaining a schedule and staying on top of assignments held in terms of their academic success. Jordan spoke up, saying, “with less time to ourselves for doing homework, it’s really
important to make the most of the time you do have. Procrastination is not an option.” Jenny indicated that without her daily planner she would be lost, as that was her tool of choice to promote organization and help her to avoid procrastination. “Without everything being written down,” she began, “I would never be able to keep it all straight. Using a planner has been a great strategy for me, just in terms of staying organized so that I don’t fall behind.”

**Study habits.** While the study habits employed may have differed, each of the female athletes interviewed for the purposes of this study showed, through the breakdown of their daily schedules, that they study at least one hour, normally two or three, each day. Furthermore, it was indicated that the majority of said studying takes place in the evening, as there is more flexibility to be had, schedule-wise, at that point in the day. It should be noted, as well, that the study habits theme presented here is one which primarily focuses on the amount of time that the female athletes are spending on homework or studying for upcoming exams, in any given week. The theme of study skills, listed below, is one that focuses more so on matters such as efficiency and time management.

While talking with several of the participants, the concept of study tables was something that also came up. Study tables, as they explained them, are facilitated study times for members of athletic teams. Generally speaking, they are mandated for freshmen and individuals who have failed to maintain a specific grade point average. There are monitors present to make sure that the time is actually being used to study, and there are tutors available, should the athletes need to consult them. The study participants indicated that while they no longer had to participate in said study tables, that access to them had helped them to organize their already hectic lives.

Jordan, Jenny, and Kelly specifically addressed study tables at some point during their interviews. Jordan explained that “my GPA is high enough that I don’t have to go to study
tables, but they were helpful during freshman year.” Jenny elaborated a bit on the process, saying, “we have access to a lot of resources, even at study tables. There are tutors there we can talk to if we need help with something, and if we need additional help, all we have to do is ask for it.” Furthermore, they explained that knowing that they could utilize the study tables or tutors if they needed them had helped them to feel more secure in their studies, as they knew that there were support structures in place if they needed to take advantage of them.

**Future goals.** All of the women interviewed possessed some sort of future goal. Some were more extensive than others, but all included getting a college degree and having a career someday. Kelly was a bit unique in terms of her future goals, as she indicated that she wanted to pursue a career as a professional athlete if at all possible. Patty also stated that she would like to remain involved, in some capacity, with the running world once she was done competing. Margaret, Holly, Jenny, and Jordan explained that they were pursuing careers that were medical in nature. All of the study participants, however, indicated that they would be pursuing a collegiate degree so that they had something to fall back on if collegiate running did not pave the road for professional competitive careers.

**Motivation sources.** In terms of where the six collegiate runners felt their motivation stemmed from, they were pretty split. Some felt that it was the athletic aspect of it all that motivated them most, others felt it was the academic portion of things, and others felt that they were truly motivated by a mixture of the two. Kelly, Jenny, Patty, and Margaret all stated, in one way or another, that a huge portion of their motivation was rooted in athletics. They did not want to be responsible for letting their teammates down. Margaret, specifically, explained that, “we have a responsibility, to ourselves and to our teammates, to try our hardest at all times. Anything less than that lets the team down.” Jordan, on the other hand, explained that she was
extremely academically motivated because the education she was getting as a result of her involvement in collegiate athletics, was going to have much more of an impact on her post-college life. Due to this, she indicated that making the most of the education she was being afforded was extremely important to her. Holly, on the other hand, was a bit split on the subject. She could see areas of her life that were more motivated by athletics, and others that were more academically motivated. “Both athletics and academics are very important to me,” she said, “but I can’t say for sure that one of them is more important than the other. I think they both go hand-in-hand”.

**Thoughts on athletic participation.** The female athletes that participated in this study, all unanimously expressed that they felt that their standing as members of a collegiate team had impacted them in a positive manner. Patty said it best, explaining that team membership had provided her with “friends and family in the form of teammates, access to tutors, and a number of skills that will be put to good use in the real world.” Kelly also spoke up, explaining that “you don’t become best friends with everyone on the team, and so there are people who you might not like that you are constantly having to interact with. Being able to handle that, and to still have a working relationship with those people is important and will definitely be a life skill that will be valued in a work setting.” While it was acknowledged that there were some drawbacks to such a standing, across the board these ladies expressed that the benefits outweighed the negatives, and that they were all very okay with the decision they had made to pursue a career in collegiate athletics.

**Study Skills**

All of the women in this study mentioned the impact that the study skills they employed had had on their success as a collegiate athlete. Patty indicated that study skills had helped her to
become “extremely efficient under pressure.” Jenny reiterated those exact sentiments, but also explained how she had learned that procrastination is a terrible idea and something that should be avoided. “You can’t procrastinate,” she said, “and if you do it catches up with you fast.” Jordan asserted that planning out your week is an excellent practice to employ. She emphasized how she felt that it really helped her to stay on top of things because “you know when you can study, what you have to do, when you have to do it … and [it really just reinforces the idea that] you can’t procrastinate.” Holly mentioned that during her years as an underclassman she had had “a lot of exposure to study tables, which helped because I felt really comfortable asking for help if I needed it.” Kelly, however, maintained her status as a bit of a black sheep by making the following statement, “Honestly, I think athletics have made my study skills worse. As athletes, we are busy a lot of the time … and I’ve gotten burned out, so I make less and less time for studying as time goes on.”

Such assertions indicate that these female athletes believe that their collegiate experiences have been impacted by the study habits that they employ. Furthermore, they illustrate the manner in which said study habits are vital to their success as both athletes and students.

**Time Management / Efficiency**

Time management and efficiency were two topics that every single participant brought up as well. Patty explained how she being a part of the team had allowed her to become better at prioritizing her time. “That carries over into scheduling too. Usually, because I know we’ll be traveling [towards the end of the week], that’s why I pack Monday and Wednesday with classes.” Kelly indicated that being an athlete had truly taught her how to manage her time, because “without a schedule, you easily lose track of the things that you need to get done.”
Jenny was on the same page, stating “I have a planner where I write down everything I need to do every day. Literally, everything….and if it’s not in the planner, it doesn’t happen.” Jenny went on to say that she enjoyed the structure that being an athlete provided her days and weeks. “If I wasn’t running,” she stated, “I don’t know what I would do with my time. We have one day off every two weeks and we all find ourselves just laying around, doing nothing, and thinking ‘I need to pick up a hobby.’” Such admissions made on the part of the study participants indicate just how valuable a skill being able to efficiently manage time truly is for collegiate athletes.

**Coaching Staff Flexibility**

Several other themes emerged during the course of the interviews that were not addressed in the vignettes. Flexibility on the part of the coaching staff when it came to studies interfering with study times, was one such theme. Each of the female athletes brought it up during the course of their interview, in one way or another. Patty explained that as long as they had received some prior notice about the situation the coaches tended to be extremely understanding. She also mentioned that during finals week, the coaches were extremely flexible. Jordan emphasized the accommodation that she felt she and her teammates were afforded during finals week, saying, “The coaches understand that [school is] what you’re here for…we’re not professional athletes, [so] it’s not all we have to do.” Jenny explained that if it was a once or twice kind of thing, she felt that the coaches would be flexible and would go out of their way to work to accommodate their athletes. “More than two times,” she stated, “I don’t think that they would be okay with it and [the coaches] would probably question how you are balancing running and school.” Margaret also brought up how she felt it was something that coaches would work with athletes about so long as it wasn’t happening all of the time. She explained further, stating, “As long as you’re not making it a habit during the normal school year, like ‘I’m gonna skip
practice to study!’ they’re definitely cool with it.” Holly spoke up, as well, explaining that “almost anything I’ve ever gone to [the coaches] about academically, they’ve been very accommodating about.” However, Kelly said it best when she explained:

“I mean obviously you can’t make it a habit, but the coaches are pretty understanding about stuff like that. They know school is important, so if we have to rearrange our own individual workout schedules for studying, that’s ok…so long as it’s not happening all of the time.”

Such statements served to truly emphasize the manner in which these females felt that their coaches would be as understanding and as flexible as possible, if they found that practice times were interfering with a final exam or the studies of their athletes.

**Team Commitment**

The value of team membership was something that each of the six participants made a point to bring up during the course of the study. Kelly indicated that being a part of a team had helped her to get along and work with all sorts of people, those that she liked, and others that she did not care for as much. Jenny discussed the positive impact that she felt her team membership had afforded her, strictly on the grounds that it surrounded her with individuals that were driven and motivated to succeed. Patty explained that she felt being a part of the cross country had done her a world of good, especially since she had come from so far away. She elaborated, stating that almost immediately, being a part of the team had provided her with “a really good sense of family and security.” Jordan and Margaret both mentioned how their standing on the team had helped them to meet and form friendships with people. Holly discussed the same thing, stating that it had helped her to develop some strong friendships with several of her teammates.
As stated above, I was granted permission to sit in on an official practice, and it was here that the aspect of team commitment was most easily seen. Not only did the female athletes go on warm-up and cool-down runs as a collective group, and complete their stretches together, but they also waited for each and every single team member who was supposed to be there to show up before practice started. They also cheered for each other as they completed the harder parts of their individual workouts. Furthermore a group of ladies who had not been selected to compete in the upcoming conference meet showed up to watch practice together and to shout words of encouragement to their teammates. It seemed clear, that being a part of a team was a responsibility that these women did not take lightly.

Summary of Chapter

This chapter focused on describing the data that was collected from six female cross country runners at a Midwestern University with a Division I designation. Structured interviews, the schedule of a typical day, and an observation of a practice were all utilized in order to gather this information. Among the themes which appeared to pervade the data, were team commitment, the flexibility of the coaching staff when it came to academics interfering with practice, time management and efficiency, study skills and habits, future goals, sources of motivation, and thoughts about the decision that had been made to participate in collegiate athletics.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to answer the following questions: 1. What are the perceived academic advantages and disadvantages associated with being an athlete for a University/College?
2. Why do female cross-country runners continue to participate during their college years?

My hope was to gain a true understanding of what it is like to be a female cross-country runner at a university with a designation of Division I at a Midwestern university. I also wanted to take a closer look at the educational advantages and disadvantages that said athletes encounter at their respective institutions of higher learning.

Phenomenology was the methodology I selected to utilize for the purposes of this study because it allowed my subjects to reflect on their experiences and their perceptions of their experiences as athletes at the collegiate level (Glesne, 1999). A structured interview protocol, the breakdown of athlete schedules, and the physical observation of a practice were data sources, used to analyze the data. It was thought that by utilizing triangulation that the data generated would be as accurate as possible (Glesne, 1999). Furthermore, since the study participants were asked and encouraged to look at their initial responses to the interview questions, and to elaborate on them if need be, member checking was also utilized. This was done intentionally, in an effort to ensure that the participants felt that they were being represented accurately.

Perceived Academic Advantages and Disadvantages

In terms of the first research question, What are the perceived academic advantages and disadvantages associated with being an athlete for a University/College?, a number of things were uncovered. In terms of advantages, the female participants felt that they were afforded priority scheduling in terms of the classes that they were taking. They believed that they had increased access to academic resources, in the form of study tables and access to tutors. Team
membership forced these athletes to maintain a particular GPA lest they have to forgo their eligibility to compete, and consequently let their teammates down. Several of the study participants indicated that they felt that they were sometimes granted extensions on assignments that other students might not have been afforded, and on more than one occasion it was brought up that these women had been incorporated into class examples when instructors had an opportunity to do so.

In terms of academic advantages, the assertions made in this study are supported by the research of the NCAA (2013), which emphasizes that one of the duties of this particular association is to assist collegiate athletes in accomplishing both their academic and athletic goals. It appears as though the steps that were taken in order to ensure that this was happening at this particular university, involved setting up mandated study tables and providing collegiate athletes with easy access to tutors if they felt that they needed them.

Paule and Gilson (2010), back up the finding that improved time management skills, team membership, and the opportunity to travel that collegiate sports provide their athletes, are benefits to actually belonging to a collegiate team. Additionally, Chen et al., (2012), argued that collegiate athletes, as a whole appear to feel as though participation in collegiate sports does more good than harm, and the findings generated in this study were consistent with that claim. Not only that, but Bailey (2006) asserts that there are a great many benefits associated with having sports in schools, and the amount of positive feedback that participants generated serves to reinforce that claim.

On the flip side, these women felt that they also were limited in the things that they could participate in during their college years. They did not feel that their busy schedules allowed them to join other clubs or to study as much as they might have wanted to. Additionally, these women
felt that they were sometimes at a disadvantage, academically, because due to competition and
sport-related travel, they occasionally had to miss class.

In terms of disadvantages Puffer-Rothenberg and Thomas (2000), mentioned that being
an athlete on the college stage means having extremely busy and structured schedules. As a
result, these individuals are unable to spend their time as freely as their collegiate non-athlete
counterparts. Ting (2009), also emphasized the idea that “Student athletes are confronted with
challenges that non-athletes do not face” (p. 225). This idea was furthered by Root (2009), who
indicated that these individuals are forced to make a number of sacrifices when it comes to their
academic careers and social lives.

**Continued Participation**

In terms of the second question the study asked, Why do female cross country runners
continue to participate during their college years, a number of answers were generated. Some of
the women felt that the competition and the health benefits that they were afforded as a result of
their athletic standing, were a huge factor. Additionally, some of the female participants voiced
the way that they truly enjoyed the standing that they held as athletes, as they felt that the respect
they were afforded by their peers and members of the community was a definite positive. Others
felt that team membership had served to provide them with a set of tools that would truly benefit
them in the working world, as they already possessed a well-developed work-ethic and were
capable of getting along with and working well with others. Others still, felt that the sense of
belonging and security that their team membership provided, was the most important factor in
their decision to come back year after year.

These findings were also consistent with research that had already been generated.
Behzadi et al. (2011) indicated in their study that individuals are deeply affected by their team
membership. This assertion was also supported by Bailey (2006) who argued that being a part of a collegiate team is something that peers and communities recognize and respect. Baily also argued that the fitness and athleticism that team membership provides is something which many athletes feel is a positive factor.

**Recommendations**

The data generated by this study provided me with enough information to make a number of recommendations to several different groups of people. The recommendations I have proposed for collegiate athletes, collegiate coaches, and the parents of collegiate athletes are listed below and are intended to help these groups ensure that the collegiate experience is the best that it can be for all parties involved.

**Collegiate athletes.** The information generated in this study suggests that collegiate athletes enjoy being a part of a team during their college years. Not only that but the results of this study indicate that being a part of a team provides athletes with a set of skills that will make them more marketable in a working environment, as they have well developed work ethics and are easily able to work with others. Time management was something that seemed to come up a lot, in terms of being something that all of these athletes had struggled with, at least initially. That being said, I would recommend that collegiate athletes utilize planners and to-do lists, in order to make the best use of the time that they do have, as these were strategies which several of the study participants mentioned as being extremely helpful in that regard.

Furthermore, I would recommend that collegiate athletes remain on their respective teams for the entirety of their collegiate careers. Based on the information that the six female runners shared with me, it seems clear that in order to make the absolute most of their college years, remaining on the team for as long as possible is vital. Not only did these females indicate that
being a part of the cross country team had provided them with a close knit group of friends, as well as a fair amount of respect from their peers and teachers, but they also indicated that if they had not remained a part of their team for the entirety of their college years that they would not have been able to reap all of the positives associated with being a collegiate athlete. These positives include getting to travel, having strong friendships and bonds with their fellow teammates, and also feeling like they were a part of the university, itself.

**College coaches.** This data suggests that flexibility when it comes to academics interfering with athletic events is something that athletes value. Not only that, but it is something which is necessary if these individuals are to be successful in their academic careers, which is the primary reason for their presence in college. The data generated in this study indicated that the coaches and members of the coaching staff at this particular university were doing an excellent job of accommodating their athletes and being flexible when studying and exams needed to take precedent. It is then my recommendation that the coaches at this specific institution continue to be as flexible as possible when their athletes need a little bit of extra time to devote to studying. Furthermore, it is my recommendation that collegiate coaches, across the board, be as flexible as they can be in this regard, and not lose sight of the way that collegiate athletes are also full time students. This is extremely important so that the athletes, themselves, are able to truly make the most of the education that their athletic participation has helped to provide them with.

**Parents of athletes.** Based on the findings of this study, it seems clear that parents of athletes should be encouraging their children to participate in collegiate sports. Not only do such sports provide them with a strong sense of team unity and a sense of belonging, but they also provide access to an education that a number of individuals would not otherwise have access to. Furthermore, team membership provides collegiate athletes with a set of skills and abilities that
make them more marketable in the real world, when it comes to the working aspect of things. Having said that, it is my recommendation that parents of athletes encourage their children to at least explore the option of becoming athletes on the collegiate stage.

**Future Study**

As stated previously, there is limited literature that exists on the experience of female cross country runners at the collegiate level that is not health related. That being said, it is my opinion that future studies should entail a continuation of this study, or at least try to garner some more research concerning the actual experience that these females are afforded at college. Due to accessibility concerns, this study looked only at the experiences had by female athletes from one school and while some information was gained, it was not to the degree that had been hoped for.

As there is still a fair amount that remains unknown about the female cross-country runner’s collegiate experiences, I wholeheartedly must emphasize the importance of continuing this vein of research. It is vital that the study be a little less narrow in scope. While I primarily focused on the athletes at one Midwestern University, it would be interesting to see if the results garnered at more schools, or schools not located in the Midwest, would generate similar results. Furthermore, to gain a more accurate picture of athlete life, in the future I would suggest that special attention be paid to the number of college years that each athlete has completed, as this may have an impact on the experiences that they have had.
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APPENDIX A

Interview Questions:

1. How many years have you been enrolled at your university?
2. Were you recruited or did you walk on to the team?
3. Did you play your sport during your first year in college?
4. Can you describe an average day for you when you are out-of-season?
5. Can you describe an average day for you when you are in-season?
6. How much time do you have during the week to study?
7. How has being a collegiate athlete impacted your life?
   a. Are there any benefits associated with being a collegiate athlete?
   b. Are there any negatives associated with being a collegiate athlete?
8. How difficult has it been for you to attend non-athletic, extracurricular events or join groups?
9. How do you think your college experience would be different if you were not an athlete?
10. What is your major?
    a. Was your choice of major impacted at all by your standing as an athlete?
11. Have you changed your major since you first entered college?
    a. If yes, what was it originally?
    b. Why did you change majors?
12. How has your athletic participation impacted your study skills?
13. How would your coach react if you had an upcoming test and needed to skip practices to get extra studying done?
14. What is/are your career goal(s) after college?
15. How does your major fit into what you want to do after college?
16. Do you think your overall education has prepared you well for life after graduation?
   a. Why do you feel this way?
17. Thinking about all your answers to the previous questions, would you consider yourself to more academically or athletically oriented?

18. Do you feel that you sometimes get stereotyped because you are an athlete?

Note: These interview questions have been taken and or adapted from Paule, A.L. & Gilson, T.A. (2010). Current collegiate experiences of big-time, non-revenue, NCAA athletes. *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport*, 3, 333-347.
**APPENDIX B:**

Breakdown of Schedule Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity Being Completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4:00 am</td>
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<tr>
<td>5:00 am</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**A Typical Day For A Female Runner (In-Season)**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12:00 am</td>
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<tr>
<td>1:00 am</td>
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<td>3:00 am</td>
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<td>4:00 am</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C:
Observation of Practice Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time &amp; Date:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants: (Thick description of the athletes at practice. How many are there? What are they wearing? Do they seem happy to be there?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching Staff: (Thick description. How many staff members are at practice? What is their overall demeanor? Do they participate in practice/drills or do they merely observe?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice: (What is asked of these athletes? What are they doing?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactions: (Do the athletes keep to themselves or do they talk/interact with each other? Do the upperclassmen talk to the underclassmen? Are there any clique-ish groups?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multitasking: (Are there any athletes who appear to be doing other things [ie: homework])</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>during the down time of practice? Is anyone listening to music while running?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion of Practice: (Do the athletes look tired after the workout has concluded? Do they appear to be hurrying off to go somewhere else, or do they loiter and take their time when leaving?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous Other Observations: (Anything else that sticks out to you when watching practice.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX D:

Participant Informed Consent

Dear Female Runners:

My name is Karslyn Kasprzak and I am a graduate assistant for Bowling Green State University’s Teaching and Curriculum program. I am interested in your experiences as a collegiate athlete. I would like to know how these experiences have impacted your college experience, and what it is about being a part of a collegiate team that has encouraged you to stick with it, year after year. I would also like to discuss what you feel have been some of the advantages and disadvantages associated with belonging to an athletic team during your collegiate years.

The primary purpose of this research is to illustrate some of the advantages and disadvantages that are associated with being a female runner at a Division I University in Northern Ohio. Special attention will be paid to the quality of education that individuals with such a nomenclature feel that they are receiving, since they are often forced to miss class in order to compete. To complete this research, and with your permission, I will be asking you to block out a schedule of a “typical” day as a collegiate athlete. I will also be sitting in on several practices to complete some observations. In addition, I will ask that you participate in a fairly brief interview about your own experiences (15-20 minutes). After the initial interview, a follow up interview (20-30 minutes) will be conducted where you will be able to look over your initial responses and elaborate on them, or discuss things initially left out, if necessary. These interviews will be conducted at a time and place that has been discussed in advance and mutually agreed upon. It must also be noted that there are no incentives or forms of payment being offered to individuals who participate in the study. However, in order to express my thanks, all participants will receive a handwritten thank you note, as well as some baked goods.

BENEFITS:

It is my hope that by taking a closer look at the experiences that female runners at the collegiate level are exposed to, that a more authentic understanding of the life of an athlete can be achieved. I feel that this study presents female athletes with a unique opportunity to discuss the impact that being a collegiate athlete has had on their life. Such opportunities are not often presented to athletes, and I feel that there is much that can be learned by taking the time to discuss these topics. By participating in this study, you are enabling non-runners to truly understand what is expected of you on a daily basis, as well as how you are able to keep up a balance between your athletic undertakings/obligations and your schoolwork.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

With your permission, excerpts from your interview(s) and observations of your practices, as well as analysis of your schedule will be included in the thesis that will be written once a sufficient amount of data has been collected. This report may then also be published on secure, scholarly
websites or in journal articles. If you choose, at any time, to withdraw from the study, any data collected in interviews or observations that you were involved in will be destroyed.

All interviews will be conducted in a one-on-one type of setting, and as such the responses will be kept confidential between interviewee and interviewer. The interview responses and observations of practice will not be used for any purpose, other than what has already been indicated. The data collected will be handled exclusively by myself, Kaitlyn Kasperski, and will be stored in a password-protected file on my home computer. Your identity will be kept confidential, as pseudonyms (fake names) will be used in the research study whenever your specific responses are referred to. You will be given the opportunity to select your own pseudonym as well. There are no extraordinary risks related to your participation in this study, and as such the risk of participation is no greater than any risks you would normally face in everyday life.

PARTICIPATION:

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. While individuals must be 18 years of age or older to participate, you are not obligated to take part if you are not interested in doing so. Similarly, you may refrain from answering any questions that you do not feel comfortable discussing, and you may end your participation in the study at any time without fear of any adverse consequences. As stated above, if you choose to withdraw from the study before the research gathering stage has concluded, your data will be destroyed so that it cannot be used in any capacity. Furthermore, withdrawing from this study will not affect your relationship with Bowling Green State University, or the university for which you are a female athlete.

CONTACT:

If at any time, you have any questions that you would like answered in regard to the research study or the procedures being utilized, you may contact Kaitlyn Kasperski (kasper@bgsu.edu; 937-304-2913) or my advisor, Tracy Huziak-Clark (huziak@bgsu.edu; 419-372-7365). Furthermore, if you have any inquiries that revolve around the conduct of this study or about your specific rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of Bowling Green State University’s Human Subjects Review Board at (419) 372-7716 (hsrb@bgsu.edu).

CONSENT:

I have read the above information and am aware of the purposes, procedures, benefits, and potential risks of this study. I have been given the opportunity to discuss this study with the researchers and all of my questions answered. I have been informed that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Additionally, I have been given a copy of this form and have been informed that by signing this letter, I agree to participate in this research study.

☐ I would like to use the following pseudonym (fake name) __________

☐ Yes, excerpts from my Schedule/Observation of Practice/Interviews may be used in the final research reports.

Participant name ________________________________

Participant signature ____________________________ Date _______________