The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between athletic identity and life satisfaction. In addition, a secondary purpose was to determine whether athletic identity or life satisfaction would differ by level of competition. Finally, a third purpose was to determine if athletic identity or life satisfaction would differ by gender. Results showed that athletic identity was not significantly related to life satisfaction. Athletic identity, as measured by the AIMS, was found to be significantly different between Division-I and Division-III student-athletes. A significant difference was also found between Division-I and Division-III student-athletes in reported life satisfaction. No significant gender differences were found in athletic identity or life satisfaction. Results also indicated a significant relationship between life satisfaction and stress. The current study addresses level of athletic competition differences and adds a new knowledge base to the previously unexplored area of life satisfaction of student-athletes.
ATHLETIC IDENTITY AND ITS RELATION TO LIFE SATISFACTION: COMPARING DIVISION-I AND DIVISION-III ATHLETES AND GENDER

T-2

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Are college student-athletes satisfied with life? What are some factors that might relate to their life satisfaction as collegiate athletes? Is it winning a conference title or national championship? Is it scoring the winning goal or free throw? Is it excelling in the academics? Or could it be having strong interpersonal relationships with teammates or classmates? To date, there have been no known published research studies that have investigated life satisfaction in current college athletes in relation to athletic identity. At times college athletes can be viewed merely as performance machines rather than a whole person. Could this emphasis on performance have any relation to their identity and their perceived life satisfaction?

College student-athletes have the unique role of being full time students and full time athletes. At both the National Collegiate Athletic Association Division-I and Division-III levels, at least 20 hours per week of the student athlete’s time is spent attending various team functions (e.g., practice, training, meetings, travel, competitions, etc.) (Aries, McCarthy, Salovey, & Banaji, 2004). Athletes may find it difficult to balance other life demands with that of their sport participation. Characteristically, Division-I institutions have longer seasons than those associated with Division-III. In addition, Division-I athletes are eligible for athletic scholarships whereas Division-III athletes are not. It could be speculated that the combination of increased time commitment to the athlete role and eligibility for athletic scholarship may place Division-I student-athletes at a greater probability of exhibiting high athletic identity. Regardless of level of competition, fulfilling increasing demands of their athletic role might have consequences on their overall quality of life.

Quality of Life

Quality of life has been defined as a construct encompassing both subjective appraisals with various life domains and more objective measures of functioning (Murphy, Hoyme, Colby, Borsari, 2006). In the past, the emphasis in understanding quality of life has been dominated by objective measures (i.e., income, marital status, employment). Currently, a great effort is being placed on subjective measures of quality of life (i.e., job satisfaction, life satisfaction, emotional responses) (Diener, 1984).
Subjective quality of life is defined as the assessment of the quality of one’s life based on personal experience and can be expressed as the degree to which individuals are satisfied with various aspects of life (Diener, 1994; Diener & Suh, 1997) and can be broken down into three separate components including positive affect, negative affect and life satisfaction. Research has found that although positive and negative affect are related to subjective quality of life, only negative affect is a predictor in subjective quality of life, suggesting that negative affect is more pertinent to life satisfaction than negative affect (Pilcher, 1998). In addition life satisfaction tends to be relatively stable over a long period of time (Pavot & Diener, 1993). In this study, measures of affect will not be included and the focus will remain on life satisfaction to assess subjective quality of life.

Historically, there have been two opposing causal models of subjective quality of life, the top-down versus bottom-up (Brief, Butcher, George & Link, 1993; Diener, 1984). Although each theoretical orientation has a number of followers, research has shown that both top-down and bottom-up approaches influence subjective quality of life in different ways. Headey and Wearing (1989) developed a dynamic equilibrium model to explain the duality of these two orientations, finding that dispositions or personality and situational differences or life events both influence subjective quality of life. In other words, the authors argue that both internal and external factors influence subjective quality of life.

Research has been limited in determining which approach has a greater impact on the individual (Fiest, Bodner, Jacobs, Miles & Tan, 1995; Headey Veenhoven & Wearing 1991). Suh, Diener and Fujita (1996) found that only life events occurring within the last three months appeared to influence reported life satisfaction, supporting Headey and Wearing’s (1989) homeostatic model. In addition, Forrest (1996) found that men’s life satisfaction is more influenced by recent events, while that of women’s is influenced by events that occur throughout the entire lifespan suggesting potential gender differences in the way one assesses satisfaction with life. Taken together, these findings suggest that life satisfaction is fairly stable over time but results could be mediated by gender. Further investigation is needed to enhance the understanding of a potential relationship between life events and gender differences in life satisfaction.
In the college age population, there are many factors that can influence a student’s perception of life satisfaction, such as; personal stress, decision making abilities and time demands (Bailey & Miller, 1998). Results illustrate a significant negative relationship between stress and life satisfaction (Demakis & McAdams, 1994; Coffman & Gilligan, 2002). That is, as the number of stressful events increases, life satisfaction decreases.

Taken together, the research demonstrates that life satisfaction is fairly stable, mediated by gender, and has a negative relationship with stress. In applying life satisfaction findings in the sport domain, would similar results ensue? The following section explores the relationship between sport participation and life satisfaction.

As a society, we are becoming more aware of the various health benefits that can be acquired by sport participation. Increased cardiovascular capacity, increased efficiency of the heart, lower blood pressure, and lower cholesterol are all possible benefits (Robergs & Keteyian, 2003). Recently, there has been a shift from examining the various physiological benefits towards understanding the possible psychological benefits one can attain through sport and physical activity. McTeer and Curtis (1993) found that individuals who participated in sport and physical activity reported an enhanced subjective well-being over those who did not engage in sport or physical activity. Valois, Zullig, Heubner, and Drane (2004) also found similar results in that there was a significant relationship between physical activity and sport participation and subjective quality of life. However, in both of these studies, results were influenced by gender (McTeer & Curtis, 1993; Valois et al., 2004). The results show that females’ life satisfaction scores increased to a greater extent than did males illustrating gender differences in life satisfaction gains with sport and physical activity.

**Athletic Identity**

Athletic identity has been defined as “the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role” (Brewer, Van Raale & Linder, 1993, p. 237). Research in athletic identity has demonstrated that formation of a strong athletic identity has both negative and positive consequences. Specifically, Brewer et al. (1993) showed that a strong identification with the athlete role can have a positive effect on the individual, and found that athletic identity was stronger in males than females and stronger in older athletes. Ryska (2002) found that having a strong athletic identity can carry over into other life
domains, increasing self-confidence. Exhibiting a strong athletic identity has a positive influence on sports achievements (Danish, Petitpas, & Hale, 1993), exercise adherence and athletic performance (Brewer et al., 1993; Horton & Mack, 2000). Other researchers have found evidence to suggest that individuals with a strong athletic identity risk experiencing difficulties after sports career termination (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). Miller and Kerr (2003) found that over identifying with the athletic role may have detrimental consequences to academic achievement as well as overall development. Brown and Hartley (1998) also found that athletes with too strong of an affiliation with the athletic role can minimize career options.

Research in athletic identity and gender has produced mixed results. Brewer et al. found that athletic identity was higher in male than in female-athletes (1993). Meyer (1990) expanded upon research conducted by Adler and Adler (1985), in which Division-I male basketball players tended to disengage from their academic commitments to further enhance their athletic performance. Meyer’s study included both male and female student-athletes and tested whether or not there were gender differences in commitment to athletics. Meyer found that female Division-I athletes were able to commit equally to both their academic and athletic commitments throughout their college career, while males tended to disassociate with their academic commitments after the first year. In contrast, other researchers have found no significant gender interactions with athletic identity (Aries, et al., 2004). These results imply that male and female student-athletes differ in their investment to their athletic and academic commitment.

Competitive Level

In a recent study comparing the life satisfaction of Division-I student-athletes to non-athletes, authors found that both male and female student-athletes scored differently when compared to age matched norms (McAllister, Motamedi, Hame, Shapiro & Dorey, 2001). These results imply that when conducting research with Division-I athletes, it may be inappropriate to compare them with non-athletes. The results also suggest that athletes are a specific population in which they should only be compared to other athletes. Thus, by investigating differences between athletes of varying levels of competition, a better understanding of the ways in which level of competition may relate to athletic identity and life satisfaction could emerge.
Few studies have investigated the differences between NCAA Division-I and Division-III athletes. Aries et al. (2004) found that Division-I student athletes found it significantly more difficult to find time to study and earn good grades than Division-III student-athletes. Other research suggests that Division-I student-athletes tend to have a more “win at all costs” mentality than Division-III student athletes (Stoll, Beller, Cole & Burwell, 1995). The authors state that the decreased emphasis on winning within Division-III student-athletes could be attributed to factors such as lack of scholarships, reduced coaching salaries, little media attention, and lower athletic budgets. Although both Division-I and Division-III athletes compete within the NCAA, the research suggests two different profiles for each level of competition.

To what extent do Division-I and Division-III athletes differ in their commitment to athletics? Within these two divisions, one might assign the role of “student-athlete” to Division-III players, while labeling Division-I athletes as “athlete-students”; thus emphasizing differences between their respective divisional affiliation. In regards to overall student development, one might conclude that the nature of Division-III athletics places less emphasis on sport, which may lead to increased life satisfaction.

One assumption could be to claim that since Division-I athletes may have more pressures on their athletic performances (especially in regards to maintaining scholarship status) than their Division-III counterparts, therefore; their overall life satisfaction may be lower. In essence, does over identifying with the athletic role have a relationship with life satisfaction? If this is the case, one would attest that, in general, Division-III athletes would be more satisfied with life than Division-I athletes. Again, why would understanding this interaction between athletic identity and life satisfaction warrant a preliminary investigation? By understanding divisional differences in athletic identity and life satisfaction, one might be able to answer the question, “who is doing it right?” Particularly, which framework helps support the increased life satisfaction of our student athletes, Division-I or Division-III?

To date, there has been no known published research in the domain of athletic identity in relation to life satisfaction for current student-athletes. As the demands of collegiate athletics increase, it is imperative to explore this relationship between athletic
identity and life satisfaction in order to help develop individuals who will be both satisfied with their life and sport participation.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between athletic identity and life satisfaction. In addition, a secondary purpose was to determine whether athletic identity or life satisfaction would differ by level of competition. Finally, a third purpose was to determine if athletic identity or life satisfaction would differ by gender.

The study hypotheses include:

1. Athletic identity will have a relationship with life satisfaction.
2. Division-I athletes will have different levels of athletic identity than Division-III athletes.
3. Division-I athletes will have different levels of life satisfaction than Division-III athletes.
4. Females will have different levels of athletic identity than males.
5. Females will have different levels of life satisfaction than males.
CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter, past and current research are discussed in regards to athletic identity, life satisfaction, and competition in the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA). This chapter has been divided into three main sections. The first section gives definition to athletic identity as well as previous research conducted to explore this construct. The second section is devoted to examining life satisfaction in regards to current theoretical orientations and findings. Lastly, NCAA Divisional differences are presented to illustrate the differences between Division-I and Division-III participation in athletics.

**Athletic Identity**

Athletic identity has been researched as an extension of self-identity, which has been generally defined as the compilation of self referent cognitions, emotions, and attitudes expressed within various aspects of life (Carver, Reynolds, & Scheier, 1994). Of specific interest is the domain-specific self-identification construct of athletic identity. Brewer, et al. (1993) defined the construct of athletic identity as “the degree to which an individual identifies with the athlete role” (p. 237). Research regarding self-identity has shown that “when there is congruence between the situation and the individual, a person will feel more positive and less negative affect” (Diener, Larson and Emmons, 1984, p. 580). In addition, researchers state that “people will choose to participate in activities that are consistent with more highly developed and central aspects of their self-concept, and they will be more satisfied with relationships that tend to confirm or validate highly salient dimensions of their self-concept” (Cornelius, 1995, p. 561). Therefore, the level of identity formation may be dependent upon the amount of importance we place on successes and failures within a specific domain. Given Harter’s (1990) theory that one’s perceived importance of a certain domain correlates with the level of personal worth and competence, Brewer et al. (1993) applied Harter’s theory, with more specificity; correlating the athletic role (i.e., domain) with athletic identity (i.e., self-concept). Therefore, as identification with the athlete role increases, success and failure in the athletic domain will have a greater effect on overall self-concept (Brewer et al., 1993; Harter, 1990).
Athletic Identity and Development in College Athletes

Both self-identity and athletic identity have been researched in the field of social sciences; but, it was not until recently that researchers have begun to investigate the relationship between the development of college athletes in relation to their athletic identity (Miller & Kerr, 2003). Research has shown that participation in intercollegiate athletics can be both beneficial and detrimental to overall student development (Chartrand & Lent, 1987). For example, participation in sport has been shown to have positive effects on individual’s perceptions of self-confidence (Armstrong, 1984; Harris, 1993) and competence (Armstrong, 1984). Specific to athletic identity, research has shown that a strong identification with the athletic role can have a positive effect on athletic performance and the development of a sense of self, and can build confidence in individuals as they improve their athletic skills (Brewer et al., 1993). In addition, Ryska (2002) found that the degree to which high school athletes identify with the athletic role may contribute to the development of confidence in other domains as well such as social interaction skills, academics and vocation.

The majority of research, however, has emphasized the potentially detrimental effects that a strong athletic identity can have on the career development process as well as lead to the increased susceptibility to emotional disturbances following an event such as athletic injury or unexpected termination of the athletic career (Brewer, 1993; Brewer et al., 1993; Martin, Adams-Muchette & Smith, 1995; Pearson & Petitpas, 1990; Murphy, Petitpas & Brewer, 1996). Furthermore, Brown and Hartley (1998) found that athletes with a strong affiliation to their athletic role were less likely to explore other career, educational, and life style options due to their intensive participation in sport. Finding similar results, Miller and Kerr (2003) found that athletes who “over-identify” with their athletic role often have a limited or reduced commitment to the student role. From these findings, it may be concluded that having a high athletic identity may lead to potential negative effects (e.g. lower GPA); however, it does not necessarily lead to dysfunctional commitment (Brown & Harley, 1998; Cornelius, 1995).

Student-Athlete Role Conflict

The label “student-athlete” is in of itself a recipe for role conflict. As the collegiate sport world changes, we are seeing a major shift in emphasis from student-
athlete to athlete-student (Renick, 1974). This shift emphasizes that the student’s academic and career goals become secondary to the needs of institutions to have winning teams. This approach may produce higher caliber athletes, however, at the stunning cost of an athlete’s academic education.

Previous research suggests that a strong athletic identity may force an athlete to neglect other aspects of life in order to fulfill the athlete role (Horton & Mack, 2000). In addition, Jones-Killeya (2005) found that students whose roles are in harmony with one another report more positive adjustment and overall college experience satisfaction than those whose identities are highly discrepant. These findings are paramount in regards to this study in that collegiate athletes who over identify with their athletic role may be at a disadvantage in overall fulfillment.

**Gender and the Formation of Athletic Identity**

Not only is athletic identity influenced by the severity and frequency of role conflict within the individual; but, as the following studies will show, gender also plays an important role in athletic identity formation. Weichman and Williams (1997) found that within the high school population, males reported higher levels of athletic identity than did females, which supports findings in previous studies comparing college age athletes (Brewer et al., 1993). They also found that those students who thought they could have a chance at playing at the professional level also had increased levels of athletic identity.

These findings demonstrate the interplay of issues surrounding student-athletes and the formation of their identity. Perhaps a main cause for these findings is that women have fewer professional sport opportunities than their male counterparts. In turn, female athletes may explore other opportunities outside of sport, therefore guiding their performance driven orientation. Thus, although females tend to score lower on athletic identity, the results could be manifested in gender socialization and not gender itself.

In opposition of previous athletic identity gender research in college age students, researchers have found that men and women student-athletes identify similarly with the athlete role (Good, Brewer, Petitpas, Van Raalte & Mahar, 1993; Murphy, Petitpas & Brewer, 1996). However, Murphy et al. (1996) did find that females had higher career maturity rates than did males echoing similar studies measuring athletic identity.
Although gender was not found to be a direct mediator of athletic identity, Murphy et al. (1996) results demonstrate gender differences within overall student athlete development, such as career maturity and identity foreclosure.

Current studies illustrate the malleability of athletic identity. Brewer, Selby, Linder and Petitpas (1999) found that after a losing season, where decreased performance satisfaction was reported, athletic identity scores decreased in comparison to athletes that endured a winning season and felt satisfied with their performance. Furthermore, Miller and Kerr (2003) found that as student athletes mature throughout their college career, there is a shift from an “over identification with the athlete role” during the first two years of college to “deferred role experimentation” in the remainder of their collegiate career. The author’s results are in congruence with previous research in which athletic identity is negatively correlated with age (Brewer et al., 1993). These findings emphasize the impact that situational and contextual differences can have on the measurement and analysis of athletic identity.

Many questions are left unanswered in the domain of athletic identity. One major gap in the literature is the fact that the majority of current studies investigate three variables in relation to athletic identity, which include student role, career maturity and gender differences. Studies have yet to examine whether athletic identity may be directly influenced by life satisfaction. Taking from previous research it is speculated that athletes who are highly committed to the athlete role may be at a higher risk of experiencing negative effects and subsequently, report a lower satisfaction with life than compared to those athletes who exhibit a more moderate athletic identity. In addition, although inferences have been made that having a more mature career pattern will lead to increased levels of satisfaction, studies neglect to evaluate life satisfaction as its own separate variable. In other words, researchers are limited in the factors they include when assessing athletic identity, therefore making a claim that level of athletic identity influences life satisfaction cannot be warranted.

Due to the inconsistencies found in previous research in regards to gender and it’s relation to athletic identity, this study hopes to further investigate potential components effecting athletes commitment to the athletic role, by using both an athletic identity and life satisfaction measure. Expanding on Brewer et al. (1999) findings that one’s
perceived satisfaction can influence level of athletic identity; this study hopes to further investigate the relationship between life satisfaction and athletic identity. Also, from this literature review, there is a need for more research in the area of athletic identity and to overall student-athlete development. The findings of this study will help aid in the promotion of student-athlete development as well as further the current knowledge base. As collegiate athletics gains popularity within mainstream society, treatment of athletes and their subsequent experiences must be illuminated. In order to help in the prevention of athlete’s overinvestment to their athletic role and subsequent immature career development outside of sport, one must first identify those variables that mediate fluctuations in order to better understand the student-athlete population. Findings from this study may have implications to athletic departments whose primary mission is to produce well-rounded student-athletes.

Quality of Life

Quality of life can be defined in various ways, which remains a constant criticism of this construct, and currently there is much debate over assembling a consistent operational definition of quality of life. A literature review conducted by Cummins and Cahill (2000), which specifically addressed this dilemma, found five key factors that remain eminent in most researchers’ views of quality of life. These factors include: (1) quality of life is multidimensional; (2) comprehensive definitions of quality of life incorporate both subjective and objective dimensions; (3) within the subjective domain, humans place varying degrees of importance to each of the domains comprising quality of life; (4) quality of life is culturally defined, particularly in regards to the objective measure, and (5) the construct of quality of life must be equally applicable to all people regardless of the circumstances (from Bramston, 2002).

It is also necessary to make a distinction between objective and subjective quality of life. Objective quality of life is the fulfillment of certain cultural and societal demands via wealth, social status, etc., while in contrast, subjective quality of life is widely thought to consist of individuals’ evaluations of their life; a process that includes emotional responses, domain satisfactions and global perceptions of satisfaction (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). Use of objective quality of life has dominated much of the research in the social sciences, but use of subjective indicators supplement external
factors (Schwarz & Strack, 1991). In addition, Bramston (2002) suggests that using subjective evaluations, versus external indicators, helps capture a sense of meaning and personal satisfaction perceived by the individual. For the purpose of this research paper, the focus will be solely on subjective quality of life, thereby excluding an analysis of objective quality of life to better understand the life satisfaction in NCAA student-athletes.

**Bottom-Up versus Top-Down Theoretical Orientations**

The majority of subjective quality of life research has been based on two theoretical frameworks that echo the classic nature versus nurture debate. The bottom-up theory states that subjective quality of life is simply the summation of many small events. In other words, a happy person will be happy because of the happy experiences that they have encountered. Therefore, the bottom-up approach states that an individual’s subjective quality of life is determined by the impact of external situational factors (Diener et al., 1999). In contrast, the top-down theory suggests that it is the individual that has the greatest impact on determining subjective quality of life, while daily life events have little influence in overall subjective quality of life (Diener, 1984).

Research supporting the top-down theory found that dispositional differences are much more accurate in predicting subjective quality of life than situational differences (e.g. environmental and demographic factors). Results showed that stability in quality of life is constant across age, sex, and educational groups. Costa, McCrae, and Zonderman (1987) suggested that environment plays a minimal role in subjective quality of life, and that domain specific gains will only show increases in that particular domain; however, those gains may not necessarily change quality of life as a whole (Costa, McCrae & Zonderman, 1987).

Diener et al. (1984) investigated the relationship an individual has with the surrounding environment by testing two separate models. The first model was the choice of situation model, which predicts that there is a relationship between dispositional characteristics, (i.e. stable factors, such as personality) and the types of situations people choose to be in. The second model, the congruence response model, states that when there is congruence with the individual (dispositional) and the environment (situational), the individual will most likely endure more positive than negative affect. Research did
not support the congruence response model. Therefore, although the setting a person chooses to be in has a small impact on positive affect, it is more conclusive to state that interactions appear to have minimal influence on either positive or negative affect. However, the influence of the interaction between the environments on the individual is overshadowed by dispositional factors. Therefore, Diener et al. (1984) supports the top-down approach.

In a recent literature review, Diener et al. (1999) compiled thirty years of research to address current issues that have been impeding the growth in subjective quality of life research, such as current flaws in methodology and theory. The authors stated that the most important contribution to the field is in understanding the limited ability of external situational factors to influence subjective quality of life. In regards to gender, the authors found that women and men do not significantly differ in their reported levels of subjective quality of life. However, women are more likely to report higher levels of positive and negative affect. In essence, the authors emphasized that the arbitrary argument of whether situational or dispositional factors are better predictors of quality of life was not of specific importance to the field at time of publication. Rather, they suggest the importance of investigating the relationship and interaction that both these frameworks present in predicting subjective quality of life within individuals.

Perhaps a more meaningful theoretical framework would be an interaction approach. Because previous studies have resulted in mixed support for whether situational or dispositional factors have a greater influence on predicting subjective quality of life, it might be more appropriate to see how these two frameworks impact one another and influence subjective quality of life. Diener (1984) states, “…the challenge is to uncover how top-down or internal factors and bottom-up molecular events interact.” (p. 565). Currently, the working model in the subjective quality of life field is that personality can predispose individuals to certain affective reactions but situational factors also influence one’s current level of subjective quality of life (Diener, et al., 1999). Thus, environment, behavior, and personality may mutually influence each other and subjective quality of life.

Taking on this challenge of integrating bottom-up and top-down approaches, Brief et al. (1993) conclude that both approaches affect subjective quality of life,
however, they do not state explicit directionality nor any type of weighting system to determine which approach, if any, has a higher amount of influence on the individual. They do, however, place much emphasis on the fact that variance in subjective quality of life may be due to the interaction of both top-down and bottom-up theories, but perhaps is better conceptualized in that it is essentially the perception of the individual that influences subjective quality of life. Both theoretical frameworks involve the perception of the individual in establishing subjective quality of life, thus the variable of perception provides an intersection between top-down and bottom-up theories. In essence, the authors conclude that arguments pertaining to which theoretical framework is a more valid measure of quality of life are arbitrary and argue that both contribute to subjective well being (Brief et al., 1993). Instead, emphasis should be placed on understanding individual’s perceptions to conceptualize quality of life. Furthermore, Diener (1984) hypothesizes that because subjective processes mediate the association between one’s subjective and objective reality, subjective judgments seem to explain a greater proportion of variance.

In a recent book review, Zullig (2005) concurs with Brief et al. (1993) and states that, “universally, only two concepts are accepted when defining quality of life; that is, quality of life is an individual psychological perception of the material reality of aspects of the world.” (p. 281). Although progression is being made toward an interaction theory of situational and dispositional factors, the majority of the researchers agree that more important than disputing theoretical orientation, is in understanding the interaction between these two theories and the implications of the results.

**Life Satisfaction**

Subjective quality of life is said to have three interrelated, but separate components consisting of global life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect (Huebner, 1991). Global life satisfaction refers to an individual’s cognitive perception of their life as a whole. Positive affect refers to an individual’s frequency of positive emotions whereas negative affect refers to an individual’s frequency of negative emotions (McCullough, Huebner & Laughlin, 2000).

Research has illustrated that life satisfaction is relatively stable over a long period of time (Costa et al., 1987; Headey & Wearing, 1989; Pavot & Diener, 1993). Although
both positive and negative affect is significantly related to life satisfaction, only negative affect is a significant predictor (Pilcher, 1998). In addition, positive and negative affect are more fluid and fluctuate over time (Diener et al., 1994; Fujita, Diener & Sanvik, 1991).

Headey and Wearing (1989) have suggested a homeostatic model of subjective quality of life. The model does not imply that subjective quality of life does not fluctuate; but rather, that situational instances may cause short term within subject variance, but eventually subjective quality of life will return to its original baseline measure. The authors found that subjective quality of life and life events were fairly stable over time, but showed the ability to fluctuate as well, whereas life satisfaction and personality characteristics appeared to be almost completely stable.

Suh et al. (1996) also tested the effects of life events on life satisfaction in a two-year longitudinal study conducted with college age students. Their main purpose was to investigate the longevity of life events within this population. The authors found that for a short period of time (about three months) recent life events influenced subjective quality of life above and beyond stable personality dispositions. Suh et al. (1996) results coincide with Heady and Wearing’s (1989) homeostatic equilibrium model where subjective quality of life is reactive to life events, but returns to a stable baseline measure rather quickly. Again the results indicate the overall stability of life satisfaction.

The cross-sectional design of the current study prohibits the use of affective measurements, and instead employs the cognitive measurement of life satisfaction. Life satisfaction is considered a cognitive process because when individuals rate their satisfaction with life, they must compare their life circumstances to a set of self-imposed standards (Coffman & Gilligan, 2002).

From these studies, it may be concluded that life satisfaction is a cognitive evaluation that remains fairly stable over a long period of time, with the ability to fluctuate within a homeostatic model.

**Life Satisfaction: Physical Activity and Sport Participation**

As a society, an increased emphasis has been placed on levels of physical activity as a determinant of subjective quality of life. The next section discusses both the impact that physical activity and sport has on life satisfaction.
McTeer and Curtis (1993) examined the relationship between participation in sport and physical activity in relation to feelings of life satisfaction in a national sample of Americans. The authors hypothesized that there would be a positive relationship between sport participation/physical activity and life satisfaction. Data was collected two separate times, with one calendar year separating Wave 1 and Wave 2. The authors found that although physical activity and sport participation significantly impacted life satisfaction among females, the same hypothesis did not hold true for the males in their sample. The authors found that the most significant predictor of life satisfaction was social interaction. These results suggest investigating physical activity-life satisfaction relationship further in-depth to determine whether or not social interactions are a main determinant for sport participation at various competitive levels.

Valois et al. (2004) looked specifically at adolescents and the degree to which their physical activity behaviors mediated perceived life satisfaction. The results from this study indicated that there was a significant relationship between non-participation in physical activity and life satisfaction in that those who did not engage in physical activity reported lower life satisfaction scores than those who engaged in physical activity. However, the authors note that the results were mediated by gender.

Life Satisfaction in College Students

There are many factors that impact college student’s perception of life satisfaction, such as; personal stress, decision-making abilities, and time demands (Bailey & Miller, 1998) and whether or not they participate in collegiate level sports (McAllister et al., 2001). This section presents research of life satisfaction within the college student population.

The relationship between stress and life satisfaction is one that is well documented in the literature. Previous research on stress and life satisfaction indicates that stress has a negative impact on life satisfaction. Researchers examined stress, social support, and life satisfaction among first year college students. Students reporting higher stress, also reported lower satisfaction with life (Coffman & Gilligan, 2002; Demakis & McAdams, 1994)

In addition, Bailey and Miller (1998) tested two hypotheses to investigate life satisfaction in college students. Specifically, they looked at whether differentiating levels
of involvement in decision-making, role responsibilities, time demands and personal stress predicted variance in life satisfaction. Participants were placed into one of three life satisfaction groups (high, moderate, and low) based on their response to a single item 5-point Likert-type scale. Results showed that those in the high life satisfaction group felt less stress than those in the low life satisfaction group. These results again emphasize the notion of Brief et al. (1993) emphasizing the importance of the individual’s perception, and in this case, in regards to level of involvement on life satisfaction.

Life Satisfaction in Athletes – Gender Differences

McAllister et al. (2001) found that when comparing athletes to non-athletes at the Division-I level using the Medical Outcomes Short Form Health Survey (SF-36; Ware, 1994) that males scored slightly different than age matched norms in the United States population, and female’s scores illustrated more substantial differences when compared against age matched norms in the United States population. The SF-36 is a measurement tool that allows researchers to assess subjective quality of life, behavioral functioning, and perceptions of overall health. The authors concluded that when elite athletes are evaluated with the SF-36, those athletes scores should be compared with other athletes, and not previously established norms from the general population. In other words, athletes are a subset of the population that differs from the general population, therefore, it is inappropriate to compare them with non-athletes.

In assessing athletes’ it is important not only to understand that there are differences between athletes and non-athletes (McAllister et al., 2001), but within the athlete population, there has been an increasing interest in addressing potential gender differences in collegiate sport participation (Adler & Adler, 1985; Meyer, 1990; Wrisberg, 1996). The following section highlights studies that specifically address gender issues in relation to collegiate sport participation.

In a previous study conducted by Adler and Adler (1985), the researchers used participant observation with collegiate male basketball players to assess the impact that sport participation had on their academic career. They found that the athletes in their sample grew increasingly more detached from their academic role due to their commitment to participate in collegiate athletics. Expanding the Adler’s findings, Meyer (1990) hypothesized that their findings would not be valid if tested on different sport
populations. Specifically, Meyer assessed the impact of gender on collegiate academic functions in female volleyball and basketball players in regard to academic expectations, classroom and athletic experiences, attitudes of self and others, and athletic experiences. Meyer found that although male and female athletes both entered college with positive affect concerning their academic role, it was only the females who maintained this affect throughout their college careers, where males tended to dissociate with this role after their first year of sport participation. In regards to athletic and academic experiences, females reported receiving equal recognition for both their athletic and academic performances whereas the males felt pressure to succeed in basketball while their academic experiences were placed on hold. These results emphasize gender differences in academic experiences, as well as expectations for collegiate athletes.

In Wrisberg’s (1996) attempt to define quality of life, he, like many others, calls attention to the role of perception, “suggesting that assessments of life quality must include the interpretation on the individual” (p. 394). In his study, Wrisberg used the 1987-1988 National Study of Intercollegiate Athletics in which athletes were compared with non-athletes. Semistructured interviews with world class athletes were also used to compare with National Study. Results indicated there were sport specific and gender differences. Wrisberg found that Division-I athletes in highly competitive football and basketball programs are at most risk for a lessened subjective quality of life. Gender was found to have mediating effects as to what types of life struggles an individual faces. For example, Wrisberg found that for males, life satisfaction was impacted by pressures to conform to NCAA Division-I standards; while females expressed that their life satisfaction was influenced by their struggle for respect and opportunity. For the purpose of the current study, no comparison of sport specific differences will be included.

Taking the current literature on life satisfaction and incorporating findings from current research, it can be concluded that there are gender effects but these results are mediated by age as well as level of physical activity and sport participation.

**Competitive Level**

In collegiate sport, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) remains the sole determinant of college or university’s level of competition. Todd and Brown
(2003) suggest that the level of competition directly dictates the competitive environment in regards to availability to athletic scholarship, importance placed on sport (vs. academics) and opponents level of ability. NCAA Division-I athletics and NCAA Division-III athletics differ greatly in their respective environments. NCAA Division-I athletic programs have the ability to award athletic scholarships, place a great amount of importance on sport performance, and recruit the highest caliber athletes. In contrast, NCAA Division-III athletics are void of athletic scholarships, place a smaller emphasis on athletic performance, and thus tend to attract less skilled athletes than their NCAA Division-I athletic counterparts (Todd & Brown, 2003).

Often times in NCAA Division-I sport, stronger emphasis is placed on athletics rather than academics. As stated earlier, “over-identification” with the athletic role can have detrimental effects on the overall development of the individual. Research shows that male students immature development of specific career goals can be linked with the expectation to play well placed on the athlete by the institution (Renick, 1974). In conjunction with Renick’s findings, Blann (1985) hypothesized that the higher the level of competition in collegiate athletics, the greater the pressure is to excel, therefore increasing the individuals potential to “over-identifying” with their athletic role. In summation, one can distinguish two separate levels of competition where the athletes have differentiating levels of identification with their athletic role.

Currently, there is a large gap in sport psychology literature in the area of athletic identity and its influence on life satisfaction. In addition many researchers often neglect to include NCAA Division-III athletes within their studies. Most commonly, when a sample of collegiate athletes is desired, researchers use NCAA Division-I athletes only (Todd & Brown, 2003). Therefore, this study will include both NCAA Division-I and Division-III athletes in order to examine both types of sport environments.

Kleiber and Malik (1989) found that exploring academic pursuits simultaneously with athletic pursuits may have implications for life satisfaction both as an active student-athlete as well as for the termination of their sport career. Those student athletes who are able to pursue both domains show increased levels of life satisfaction as well as more mature identity formation in comparison with student-athletes who over invest in their athletic role. Since participants in this study were from Division-I programs, their results
may not be applicable to a population such as Division-III athletes. It is important to investigate various levels of competition to illuminate potential differences within NCAA student-athletes.

In a study assessing Division-I student-athletes motivation towards achievement, Simons, Van Rheenen and Covington (1999) found that commitment to athletics was negatively correlated with GPA. Individuals with a high commitment to athletics had low college GPA’s. This supports the statement that as commitment to the athletic role increases, commitment to the academic role is decreased. This study uses previous findings as a foundation, in which one will be able to further investigate what other domains are sacrificed when an individual is highly committed and invested in their athletic role. Studies have shown that GPA or commitment to the academic role is decreased as athletic identity increases. However, in what other ways does having a high investment in one’s athletic role have on other domains? Specifically, the purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between athletic identity and life satisfaction. In addition, a secondary purpose was to determine whether athletic identity or life satisfaction would differ by level of competition. Finally, a third purpose was to determine is athletic identity or life satisfaction would differ by gender.
CHAPTER THREE
METHODS

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between athletic identity and life satisfaction. In addition, a secondary purpose was to determine whether athletic identity or life satisfaction would differ by level of competition. Finally, a third purpose was to determine if athletic identity or life satisfaction would differ by gender.

Overview of Study Design

To examine the above hypotheses, a series of paper and pencil questionnaires assessing athletic identity, life satisfaction, stress, and perceived importance rankings were administered to a sample of college student-athletes during the spring. Data analyses were cross-sectional since data was only collected at one point in time; thus results are correlational in nature. The research procedures for this proposed study were reviewed and approved by the Miami University Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects.

Participants

A total of 270 student-athletes agreed to participate in the study. One participant was unable to complete the questionnaire packet and fifteen packets were incomplete, thus, giving a sample size of 254. Participants were 254 NCAA student-athletes from a variety of schools within the Midwest, one school on the West Coast, and one school on the East Coast. Overall, this sample had a greater number of males \( n = 172, 68\% \) than females \( n = 82, 32\% \), a greater number of Division-III student-athletes \( n = 135, 54\% \) than Division-I student-athletes \( n = 119, 46\% \), and a greater number of first year student-athletes \( n = 100, 39\% \) than sophomores \( n = 59, 23\% \), juniors \( n = 61, 24\% \), seniors \( n = 32, 13\% \), or fifth year \( n = 2, <1\% \) student-athletes. Athletes’ ages ranged from 18 to 23 years, with a mean age of 19.8 years \( (SD = 1.13) \).
Table 1

Breakdown of Subjects by Gender, Year in School and Level of Competition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Division-I</th>
<th></th>
<th>Division-III</th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth-Year</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants competed in a variety of sports including baseball (n = 60, 24%) men and women’s track and field (n = 33, 13%), men and women’s swimming and diving (n = 39, 15%), football (n = 66, 26%), women’s golf (n = 2, <1%), women’s volleyball (n = 11, 4%), women’s soccer (n = 29, 11%), women’s field hockey (n = 15, 6%) and men’s basketball (n = 1, <1%). The majority of the sample were classified as “White (Caucasian)” (n = 233, 92%). Participants reported an average of 19.52 hours per week spent in sport participation (SD = 7.38). Half of the athletes in this study reported they were currently competing, and the other half reported they were not currently competing. In addition, 41% (n = 103) of participants indicated they had a winning season, while 59% (n = 148) did not win over 50% of their competitions. In regards to playing time, 34% (n
of participants reported they felt they had less playing time in comparison to their teammates, 20% \((n = 53)\) reported they felt they had equal playing time in comparison with their teammates, and 46% \((n = 114)\) of participants felt they had more playing time in comparison with their teammates. Participants reported current enjoyment level of sport with a mean of 5.52 \((SD = 1.22)\), scored on a 7 point Likert-type scale.

**Data Collection Procedures**

Recruitment of participants began when the author contacted coaches from a variety of Division-I and Division-III athletic teams via email or phone. The purpose and procedures were explained to the coaches. Those coaches who agreed to participate were then asked to schedule a data collection time with all of the athletes on their team. This data collection time was scheduled at the coach’s (and team’s) convenience (most typically before or after a regularly scheduled practice session). A total of 8 out of the 10 coaches agreed to participate in the current study.

At this data collection session, the author began by providing the athletes with both verbal and written explanations (see oral script provided in Appendix A). Included in this explanation was the assurance that athletes were not required to participate in the study and that they could withdraw at any point with no further penalty. Athletes were assured that all responses would be kept anonymous. Those players who chose to participate were given pencils and asked to complete the questionnaire packet as honestly and thoroughly as possible. Once the athlete was completed with the packet, he or she was free to leave. On average, completion of the questionnaire ranged from 15 to 20 minutes. It should be noted that during one data collection session, the author was unavailable to attend, thus a colleague administered the questionnaire packets and was given both oral and written procedural instructions.

**Instrumentation**

A series of self-report questionnaires were used in this study and are described in the following section.

**Athletic Identity Measurement Survey**

The AIMS was developed by Brewer et al. (1993) to measure athletic identity. The survey consists of 10 questions that are answered on a Likert-type scale ranging from 7 “strongly agree” to 1 “strongly disagree.” Brewer and colleagues used the 10 questions
to assess social, cognitive, and affective aspects of athletic identity. (See Appendix B). The AIMS is scored by summing the responses for all 10 questions. Thus, scores can range from 10-70. A higher score means that the person greatly identifies with their athletic role, whereas a lower score means they have minimal investment in their athletic role.

To test the reliability of the AIMS, Brewer et al. (1993) administered the AIMS in three separate studies. Participants in the first study were undergraduates enrolled in an introductory sport psychology class, subjects in the second study were undergraduates enrolled in an introductory psychology class, and the third sample included subjects from the University football team. Brewer et al. (1993) administered the AIMS for the three samples on separate occasions and found alpha coefficients of .93, .87, and .81, respectively. Since the results indicated alpha coefficients above .80 for these three studies, the authors concluded that the AIMS is a reliable, internally consistent instrument. In addition, the AIMS exhibited a test-retest reliability of .82.

**Brief Multidimensional Students’ Life Satisfaction Scale (BMSLSS)**

The BMSLSS is a condensed version of the Multidimensional Students’ Satisfaction with Life Scale (MSLSS), which was created by Huebner and colleagues (Huebner, 1994; Huebner, Laughlin, Ash, & Gilman, 1998). The BMSLSS serves as an assessment of life satisfaction, in cases where time administration is a factor. Use of the BMSLSS has been validated within adolescent populations (Funk, Heubner, & Valois, 2006; Seligson, Huebner & Valois, 2003; Valois et al., 2004) and college students (Zullig, Huebner, Gilman, Patton & Murray, 2005). Specifically, Zullig et al. (2005) found an internal consistency coefficient alpha of .82 demonstrating the reliability of the BMSLSS within the college student population.

The BMSLSS assesses five specific domains including family, friends, school, self and living environment. The stem of the questions state, “I would describe my satisfaction with my (fill in specific domain) as…” Responses range from 1 to 7 on a Likert-type scale (1=Terrible, 2=unhappy, 3=mostly dissatisfied, 4=mixed, 5=mostly satisfied, 6=pleased and 7=delighted). The final question in the BMSLSS asks the individual to consider the level of satisfaction with his/her “overall life”. The BMSLSS total score was calculated by summing the five domains and then dividing by five.
Student Stress Scale

The Student Stress Scale represents an adaptation of Holmes and Rahe's Life Event Scale (1967). It has been modified to apply to college age adults and should be considered as a rough indication of stress levels and health consequences. In the Student Stress Scale, each event, such as an increase in workload at school, is given a score that represents the amount of readjustment a person has to make in life as a result of the change. Persons with scores of 300 and higher have a high health risk. Individuals scoring between 150 and 300 points have about a 50-50 chance of serious health change within two years. Subjects scoring below 150 have a 1 in 3 chance of serious health change.

Perceived Importance Ranking Scale

The author developed a 14-item questionnaire to examine perceived importance differences between Division-I and Division-III student-athletes and gender. The 14 items included “achievement in academics”, “achievement in athletics”, “feeling good about my personal performance”, “feeling good about myself outside of sport”, “getting the maximum amount of ‘play’ time during competition”, “having a good relationship with the coach”, “having a romantic partner”, “keeping in shape”, “maintaining interpersonal relationships with teammates”, “maintaining interpersonal relationships with classmates”, “making money”, “spiritual development”, “using my college major for work purposes after graduation”, and “winning.” Participants were asked to rank the 14-items individually in order of perceived importance, with lower scores illustrating higher perceived importance. Thus a ranking of “1” would describe the most important variable currently, and “14” would describe the least important. Use of this scale was included to investigate differences in perceived importance in congruence with the AIMS.

Demographic and Performance Evaluation Form

Each participant was asked to complete a demographic questionnaire. Questions assessed the athletes’ year in school, gender, sport played, competitive level, age, ethnic affiliation, average number of hours per week committed to their sport participation, currently level of enjoyment in sport participation, whether or not they are currently competing, whether or not they are currently in season, perceived amount of playing time
in comparison to teammates, and whether or not they endured a winning (winning more than 50% of competitions) or losing (losing over 50% of competitions) season.

**Data Analysis**

To assess the relationship between athlete’s level of identity with their athletic role and perceived subjective quality of life, a Pearson correlation analysis was used. *T* tests were conducted to assess the difference between athletic identity and life satisfaction in Division-I and Division-III student-athletes. Additional *t* tests assessed the difference between athletic identity and life satisfaction in male and female student-athletes. To assess the relationship between stress and life satisfaction, a Pearson correlation was conducted. Finally, a Mann-Whitney U was performed to assess differences between perceived importance rankings in Division-I and Division-III student-athletes and between male and female student-athletes.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between athletic identity and life satisfaction. In addition, a secondary purpose was to determine whether athletic identity or life satisfaction would differ by level of competition. Finally, a third purpose was to determine if athletic identity or life satisfaction would differ by gender.

These results are divided into three sections. The first section reports descriptive statistics. The second section of this chapter presents the analyses for each hypothesis. The third section reports additional analyses for gender, competition level, perceived stress levels and perceived importance of athletics and academics.

**Descriptive for all Variables**

Table 2 shows the descriptive data for the AIMS, which was used to investigate how strongly student-athletes identify with the athlete role. The ten AIMS domain means ranged from 6.65 to 2.14 on a seven-point scale, with the higher number indicating a stronger identification with the athlete role. Each domain score is summed to create a total AIMS score. The mean score for the AIMS was 48.95 (range = 17 to 68, SD = 8.91). The AIMS exhibited an internal consistency, with a Cronbach’s alpha = .83. Since scales demonstrating coefficients greater than .70 are considered to have an acceptable level of internal consistency, the AIMS was deemed a reliable measure (Nunnally, 1978).
Table 2

Descriptive Data for the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AIMS</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I consider myself an athlete</td>
<td>6.66</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>1 to 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have many goals related to sport</td>
<td>6.18</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>1 to 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of my friends are athletes</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>1 to 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport is the most important part of my life</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>2 to 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I spend more time thinking about sport than anything else</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>1 to 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I need to participate in sport to feel good about myself</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>1 to 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other people see me mainly as an athlete</td>
<td>5.09</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>1 to 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel bad about myself when I do poorly in sport</td>
<td>5.33</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>1 to 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport is the only important thing in my life</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>1 to 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would be very depressed if I were injured or could not compete in sport</td>
<td>4.94</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>1 to 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 shows the descriptive data for perceptions of life satisfaction, athletic identity, and stress by gender, division and all participants. The BMSLSS score resulted in means that ranged from 6.1 to 5.1 on a seven-point scale, with a higher score indicating a greater satisfaction with life. The mean score for all of the five domains was 5.64 (range = 2.2 to 7.0, SD = .78). These results show the majority of athletes’ have high perceived life satisfaction. The BMSLSS showed acceptable internal consistency, with a Cronbach’s alpha of .74.

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations for the SSS, AIMS, and BMSLSS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Stress (M, SD)</th>
<th>Athletic Identity (M, SD)</th>
<th>Life Satisfaction (M, SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>331.02 (159.87)</td>
<td>47.45 (8.92)</td>
<td>5.70 (0.84)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>276.87 (159.87)</td>
<td>49.66 (9.11)</td>
<td>5.61 (0.75)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division-I</td>
<td>300.49 (155.01)</td>
<td>50.41 (8.50)</td>
<td>5.75 (0.73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division-III</td>
<td>288.99 (167.55)</td>
<td>47.73 (9.11)</td>
<td>5.55 (0.80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>294.35 (161.61)</td>
<td>48.95 (8.92)</td>
<td>5.64 (0.78)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3 also shows the descriptive data for reported levels of stress. The Student Stress Scale was used to assess stress levels for student-athletes in this sample. Scores on the Student Stress Scale exhibited a mean of 294.35 (range = 0 to 786, SD = 161.61). The Student Stress Scale demonstrated an acceptable internal consistency with a Cronbach’s alpha of .71.

Frequency distributions illustrate that “an increase in workload at school” as the most common stressor as 84% of participants indicated the occurrence of the event within the past twelve months. Other stressors reported on a consistent basis included, “change in sleeping habits” (60%), “change in living conditions” (58%), “outstanding personal achievement” (53%), “change in social activities” (51%), “change in eating habits” (48%), “lower grades than expected” (46%), “change in status on team” (45%), and “first quarter/semester in college” (43%). Those who score below 150 are predicted to have a one in three chance of serious health change within the next two years (20.7%), those who score between 150 and 300 (35.5%) have about a 50-50 chance of serious health change, and those scoring over 300 (43.7%) are considered to be at a high health risk (Holmes & Rahe, 1967). It is interesting to note that nearly half (n = 144) of the athletes’ reported scores above 300.

The author developed a 14-item questionnaire to examine whether athletes who strongly identified with the athlete role would also rank “achievement in athletics,” and “winning” as more important than “achievement in academics.” Interestingly, the results show that over one-third (36.3%) of the sample ranked “achievement in academics” as most important, while 2.3% reported it to be the least important. Contrastingly, 9.5% of participants reported “achievement in athletics” as most important, while only one individual ranked it to be the least important. In regards to “winning,” 6.9% of participants reported it to be the most important, while 8.8% felt it was the least important. Mean scores from each of the 14 variables ranged from 3.70 (“achievement in academics”) to 9.9 (“getting the maximum amount of ‘play’ time during competition”), with a lower score indicating more importance (See Tables 4 – 8). From this data, we can infer that some athletes view their achievements in academics as more important than achievement in athletics and/or winning.
Table 4
Means and Standard Deviations for the Perceived Importance Ranking Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achievement in academics</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>3.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement in athletics</td>
<td>4.99</td>
<td>3.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling good about my personal performance</td>
<td>5.74</td>
<td>3.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling good about myself outside of sport</td>
<td>5.67</td>
<td>3.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting the maximum amount of 'play' time during competition</td>
<td>9.90</td>
<td>3.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a good relationship with the coach</td>
<td>9.19</td>
<td>2.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a romantic partner</td>
<td>8.30</td>
<td>3.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping in shape</td>
<td>6.54</td>
<td>3.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining interpersonal relationships with teammates</td>
<td>6.66</td>
<td>3.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining interpersonal relationships with classmates</td>
<td>9.71</td>
<td>3.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making money</td>
<td>9.54</td>
<td>3.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual development</td>
<td>9.33</td>
<td>4.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using my college major for work purposes after graduation</td>
<td>7.60</td>
<td>4.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winning</td>
<td>8.12</td>
<td>4.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5

Means and Standard Deviations for the Perceived Importance of Athletics and Academics by Level of Competition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Division-I</th>
<th>Division-III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achievement in academics</td>
<td>4.09 (3.64)</td>
<td>3.37 (3.38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement in athletics</td>
<td>4.19 (2.84)</td>
<td>5.64 (3.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling good about my personal performance</td>
<td>5.21 (3.02)</td>
<td>6.18 (3.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling good about myself outside of sport</td>
<td>5.66 (3.42)</td>
<td>5.68 (3.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting the maximum amount of 'play' time during competition</td>
<td>9.58 (3.18)</td>
<td>10.17 (3.21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a good relationship with the coach</td>
<td>8.70 (2.99)</td>
<td>9.30 (2.83)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a romantic partner</td>
<td>8.56 (3.88)</td>
<td>8.09 (3.49)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping in shape</td>
<td>6.97 (3.28)</td>
<td>6.19 (2.82)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining interpersonal relationships with teammates</td>
<td>6.11 (3.10)</td>
<td>7.12 (3.24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining interpersonal relationships with classmates</td>
<td>9.89 (3.45)</td>
<td>9.56 (3.61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making money</td>
<td>9.78 (3.66)</td>
<td>9.34 (3.87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual development</td>
<td>10.10 (4.54)</td>
<td>9.70 (4.95)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using my college major for work purposes after graduation</td>
<td>8.09 (4.02)</td>
<td>7.20 (4.51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winning</td>
<td>8.13 (4.03)</td>
<td>8.12 (4.09)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6

Means and Standard Deviations for the Perceived Importance of Athletics and Academics by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achievement in academics</td>
<td>2.60 (2.66)</td>
<td>4.19 (3.74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement in athletics</td>
<td>5.27 (3.13)</td>
<td>4.86 (3.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling good about my personal performance</td>
<td>5.19 (2.86)</td>
<td>5.99 (3.13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling good about myself outside of sport</td>
<td>4.86 (3.10)</td>
<td>6.04 (3.36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting the maximum amount of 'play' time</td>
<td>10.58 (2.47)</td>
<td>9.60 (3.45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>during competition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a good relationship with the coach</td>
<td>9.94 (2.71)</td>
<td>8.85 (2.98)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a romantic partner</td>
<td>8.64 (3.54)</td>
<td>8.15 (3.72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping in shape</td>
<td>6.01 (2.80)</td>
<td>6.78 (3.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining interpersonal relationships with</td>
<td>6.65 (2.81)</td>
<td>6.66 (3.38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teammates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining interpersonal relationships with</td>
<td>8.68 (3.58)</td>
<td>10.17 (3.42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>class mates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making money</td>
<td>9.97 (3.46)</td>
<td>9.34 (3.90)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual development</td>
<td>9.50 (4.66)</td>
<td>9.26 (4.88)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using my college major for work purposes</td>
<td>6.64 (4.07)</td>
<td>8.04 (4.35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>after graduation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winning</td>
<td>10.54 (2.85)</td>
<td>7.02 (4.09)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7

Means and Standard Deviations for the Perceived Importance of Athletics and Academics by Level of Competition- Female

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female Division-I</th>
<th>Female Division-III</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Achievement in academics</td>
<td>3.00 (2.84)</td>
<td>2.09 (2.35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement in athletics</td>
<td>4.64 (2.86)</td>
<td>6.09 (3.32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling good about my personal performance</td>
<td>4.48 (2.63)</td>
<td>6.12 (2.92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling good about myself outside of sport</td>
<td>4.68 (3.34)</td>
<td>5.09 (2.80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting the maximum amount of 'play' time during competition</td>
<td>9.66 (2.56)</td>
<td>11.81 (1.70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a good relationship with the coach</td>
<td>9.84 (2.73)</td>
<td>10.06 (2.72)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a romantic partner</td>
<td>8.50 (3.55)</td>
<td>8.82 (3.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping in shape</td>
<td>6.16 (2.97)</td>
<td>5.82 (2.60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining interpersonal relationships with teammates</td>
<td>5.93 (2.86)</td>
<td>7.59 (2.50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining interpersonal relationships with class mates</td>
<td>9.10 (3.57)</td>
<td>8.15 (3.59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making money</td>
<td>10.57 (3.33)</td>
<td>9.21 (3.53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual development</td>
<td>11.18 (3.91)</td>
<td>7.32 (4.71)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using my college major for work purposes after graduation</td>
<td>7.48 (3.92)</td>
<td>5.56 (4.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winning</td>
<td>10.23 (2.49)</td>
<td>10.94 (3.27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male Division-I</td>
<td>Male Division-III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement in academics</td>
<td>4.80 (3.92)</td>
<td>3.79 (3.57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement in athletics</td>
<td>3.91 (2.81)</td>
<td>5.50 (3.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling good about my personal performance</td>
<td>5.68 (3.17)</td>
<td>6.20 (3.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling good about myself outside of sport</td>
<td>6.29 (3.35)</td>
<td>5.87 (3.37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting the maximum amount of 'play' time during competition</td>
<td>9.54 (3.53)</td>
<td>9.64 (3.40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a good relationship with the coach</td>
<td>7.97 (2.95)</td>
<td>9378 (2.87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a romantic partner</td>
<td>8.59 (4.10)</td>
<td>7.84 (3.44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping in shape</td>
<td>7.49 (3.38)</td>
<td>6.31 (2.90)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining interpersonal relationships with teammates</td>
<td>6.22 (3.26)</td>
<td>6.96 (3.45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining interpersonal relationships with classmates</td>
<td>10.39 (3.30)</td>
<td>10.03 (3.51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making money</td>
<td>9.28 (3.79)</td>
<td>9.39 (3.99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual development</td>
<td>9.41 (4.79)</td>
<td>9.16 (4.69)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using my college major for work purposes after graduation</td>
<td>8.48 (4.07)</td>
<td>7.75 (4.53)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winning</td>
<td>6.80 (4.26)</td>
<td>7.17 (3.99)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Relationship between Athletic Identity and Life Satisfaction

The first hypothesis stated that athletic identity would be related to life satisfaction. To test whether athletic identity was related to life satisfaction, a Pearson correlation was conducted. Results indicated that athletic identity and life satisfaction are not significantly related $r(254) = .053, p > .396$. There was a mild inverse relationship indicating when athletic identity increases, life satisfaction decreases. Results did not support Hypothesis One.

Athletic Identity and Level of Competition

The second hypothesis stated that Division-I athletes would have different levels of athletic identity than Division-III athletes. To test whether athletic identity would differ by level of competition, a two-sample independent $t$ test was conducted. Results indicated a significant difference in identification with the athlete role between Division-I and Division-III student-athletes, $t(254) = 2.421, p = .016$. Specifically, Division-I student-athletes reported a significantly higher identification to the athlete role ($M = 50.41, SD = 8.50$) than Division-III student athletes identified with the athlete role ($M = 47.73, SD = 9.11$). Results support Hypothesis Two.

Life Satisfaction and Level of Competition

The third hypothesis stated that Division-I student-athletes would have different levels of life satisfaction than Division-III student-athletes. To test whether life satisfaction would differ by level of competition an additional two-sample independent $t$ test was performed. Results indicated a significant difference in life satisfaction by level of competition, $t(254) = 2.088, p = .038$. Those athletes who compete at the Division-I level reported higher life satisfaction ($M = 5.75, SD = 0.73$) than athletes at the Division-III level ($M = 5.55, SD = 0.80$). Results indicate full support of Hypothesis Three.

Gender Differences in Athletic Identity

The fourth hypothesis stated that female student-athletes would have different levels of athletic identity than male student-athletes. To test whether athletic identity would differ by gender, a two-sample independent $t$ test was conducted. Results indicated there was not a significant difference $t(254) = 1.859, p = .064$. Male ($M = 49.66, SD = 9.11$) and female ($M = 47.45, SD = 8.92$) collegiate athletes do not differ in identifying with the athlete role. Results did not support Hypothesis Four.
Gender Differences in Life Satisfaction

The fifth hypothesis stated that female student-athlete would have different levels of life satisfaction than male student-athletes. To test whether life satisfaction would differ by gender, a two-sample independent $t$ test was conducted. Results indicated that male ($M = 5.61$, $SD = .75$) and female ($M = 5.70$, $SD = .84$) collegiate athletes do not differ in their reported life satisfaction $t(254) = -.874$, $p = .384$. Thus, Hypothesis Five was not supported.

Student Stress, Life Satisfaction, Level of Competition, and Gender

To test whether stress would be related to life satisfaction, a Pearson correlation was conducted. Results indicated a significant negative relationship ($r(254) = -.167$, $p = .01$). Therefore, the more stress student-athletes perceive, the lower their life satisfaction scores.

A $t$ test was conducted to evaluate the difference of stress by level of competition. Results indicated a non-significant difference $t(249) = .562$, $p = .575$). Although Division-I student-athletes’ scores on the SSS were slightly higher ($M = 300.49$, $SD = 155.01$) than those reported by Division-III student-athletes ($M = 288.99$, $SD = 167.55$), the difference is not significant.

To test the difference of stress by gender, a two-sample independent $t$ test was conducted. Results indicated that females report significantly higher stress when compared to males, $t(249) = -2.508$, $p = .013$. On average, females scores ($M = 331.02$, $SD = 159.87$) exceeded the 300 point standard where there is an increased potential for health risks, while males scores ($M = 276.87$, $SD = 159.87$) were just under this standard.

Perceived Importance of Athletics and Academics, Level of Competition and Gender

A Mann-Whitney test was computed to test the difference in rank order of Perceived Importance of Athletics and Academics between Division-I and Division-III student-athletes. Table 5 shows the descriptive data for the fourteen (14) variables assessed in the Perceived Importance of Athletics and Academics inventory by level of competition. Division-I student-athletes ranked “achievement in athletics” ($z = -3.581$, $p < .001$), “feeling good about my personal performance” ($z = -2.756$, $p = .006$), “having a good relationship with the coach” ($z = -2.393$, $p = .017$), and “maintaining interpersonal
relationships with teammates \( z = -2.334, p = .02 \) as significantly more important than their Division-III counterparts.

In contrast, Division-III athletes on average ranked “achievement in academics” \( z = -1.946, p = .052 \) and “spiritual development” \( z = -1.998, p = .046 \) as more important than Division-I student-athletes. These results were congruent with the notion that Division-I student-athletes tend to place more importance on athletic pursuits while Division-III student-athletes place more emphasis on academic pursuits (Stoll et al., 1995).

An additional Mann-Whitney test was conducted to test the difference in rank order of perceived importance for athletics and academics by gender. Table 6 shows the descriptive data for the fourteen (14) variables assessed in the perceived ranking inventory by gender. Female student-athletes ranked “achievement in academics” \( z = -3.467, p = .001 \), “feeling good outside of sport” \( z = -2.604, p = .009 \), “maintaining interpersonal relationships with class mates” \( z = -3.054, p = .002 \), and “using my college major for work purposes after graduation” \( z = -2.413, p = .016 \) as significantly more important than male student-athletes.

Males ranked “having a good relationship with the coach” \( z = 2.669, p = .008 \) and “winning” \( z = -6.261, p < .001 \) as significantly more important than female student-athletes. Additional analyses were able to illustrate significant relationships between life satisfaction and stress and in the perceived importance of athletics and academics between level of competition and gender.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION

Overall, the results from this study indicate that athletic identity is not significantly related to life satisfaction. The lack of a significant relationship between athletic identity and life satisfaction may suggest factors other than commitment to the athlete role affect life satisfaction in student-athletes. Previous research concerning the malleability of athletic identity found that level of athletic identity was contingent upon whether or not an individual was cut from the team (Grove, Fish, & Ecklund, 2004). In other words, those who were selected for the team exhibited stable AIMS scores across the season, while those who were not selected showed a significant decrease in AIMS scores. Additional research found a significant divestment in athletic identity after a “losing” season, while AIMS remained stable for those experiencing a “winning” season (Brewer et al., 1999). For the participants in the current study athletic identity was significantly related to playing time ($r(254) = .135, p = .031$), however, illustrated a non-significant relationship with seasonal success ($r(251) = .048, p = .445$). In other words, as amount of playing time increases, athletic identity will also increase. In contrast, seasonal success was not a significant factor in participant’s commitment to the athlete role. These results suggest that if the athlete perceives they have more playing time in comparison to teammates, they may have an increased athletic identity score. It would be interesting to observe the interaction between playing time and seasonal success in relation to athletic identity using a longitudinal study.

Athletic identity, as measured by the AIMS, was found to be significantly different between Division-I and Division-III student-athletes. Specifically, Division-I student-athletes reported higher athletic identity scores than Division-III student-athletes. These results suggest that Division-I institutions may promote high athletic identity, whereas Division-III institutions may promote a more moderate athletic identity. Given the conditions of Division-I athletics, athletic scholarships, high coaching salaries and large athletic budgets; the athletes may be more likely to develop a strong athletic identity. In contrast, Division-III athletics has no athletic scholarships, lower coaching salaries, and small athletic budgets, therefore; the athletes may be less likely to develop a strong athletic identity because of the lack of emphasis put on athletic teams.
Previous research concerning gender and athletic identity has resulted in mixed findings. Some research has shown significant differences in athletic identity between male and female athletes (Brewer et al. 1993; VanRaalte & Cook, 1991; Weichman & Williams, 1997). Specifically, this research concluded that males exhibit higher AIMS scores than female athletes. In contrast, other research found no such difference (Good et al., 1993; Lantz & Schroeder, 1999; Murphy et al., 1996) and found gender was not a significant component in athletic identity. The results from this study showed there was no significant difference in athletic identity in male and female student-athletes. Perhaps this means that female athletes are becoming more accepted within our sport culture. Efforts such as Title IX, which have drastically increased the number of sport opportunities for female athletes, may have served as the impetus for this cultural shift. It could be speculated that the increase in social acceptance of females within sport has lead to males and females exhibiting similar athletic identity scores.

Life satisfaction, as measured by the BMSLSS, was significantly different in Division-I and Division-III student-athletes. Specifically, Division-I student-athletes reported a significantly higher life satisfaction scores than Division-III student-athletes life satisfaction scores. For the participants in the current study, both playing time ($r(254) = .148, p = .018$) and seasonal success ($r(251) = .131, p = .038$), were significantly related to life satisfaction. The results indicate that the more one plays and the more one wins, the more satisfied with life she/he will be. This difference could be explained by the ways in which Division-I student-athletes assess their life satisfaction. Who would not be satisfied with living the life of a Division-I student-athlete (e.g. athletic scholarship, free equipment, access to trainers, counselors, weight lifting facilities, etc.)? Perhaps Division-I athletes have created a false sense of satisfaction, thus exhibit higher life satisfaction scores than Division-III student-athletes who do not receive similar benefits.

In addition, life satisfaction was not significantly different by gender. The findings are consistent with previous research (Diener et al., 1999), in which life satisfaction is not significantly related to gender. However, other researchers have found a significant difference in general satisfaction scores by gender (Valois, et al., 2004). Specifically, Murphy, McDevitt-Murphy, & Barnett (2005) found that females scored
significantly higher than males on reports of general satisfaction. Although differences were not significant, it is not necessarily an insignificant finding. The fact that male and female student-athletes have similar life satisfaction scores suggests that regardless of gender, the participants in this study were mostly satisfied with life.

Additional analyses illustrate a significant negative relationship between stress and life satisfaction. That is, as the number of stressful events increases, life satisfaction decreases. This finding is consistent with previous research (Coffman & Gilligan, 2002; Demakis & McAdams, 1994), in which college students who reported higher levels of stress also reported lower satisfaction with life. Similarly, research concerning life satisfaction in college students’ shows if depression increases then life satisfaction decreases (Brink & Niemeyer, 1992; Pilcher, 1998). The results from the current study suggest that student-athletes who endure multiple stressful events may be at risk for decreased life satisfaction. It is likely that student-athletes who experience high levels of stress (e.g. death of a close family member, increase in workload at school, change in sleeping habits) would be less satisfied with life because they must deal with their current problems. Also, student-athletes who report low stress scores are not obligated to deal with stressful life events that would lower their life satisfaction. It would seem that the impact of stress upon life satisfaction needs to include further research on the specific type of stressors that most impact student-athletes.

Results also demonstrate that female student-athletes endure higher amounts of stress than male student-athletes, which place female student-athletes among those at high risk for health problems. This finding supports previous research (Hudd, Dumlao, Erdmann-Saget, Murray, Phan, Soukas, & Yokozka, 1992) in which female college students are more likely to be “stressed” than male students and females experienced more stress from life changes than men (Miller & Rahe, 1997). The findings suggest that it may be useful to develop gender-specific programs targeted at reducing the general stress levels of female student-athletes. Future research should consider the unique sources of stress among female student-athletes.

Significant differences were also found in perceived importance of achievement in academics and achievement in athletics between Division-I and Division-III student-athletes. Division-I student-athletes ranked achievement in athletics as most important.
and Division-III student-athletes ranked achievement in academics as third most
important. This significant difference could be explained by the different nature of
Division-I and Division-III athletic programs. Take for example a highly popular media
and sporting event, the NCAA men’s basketball tournament. Think of the potential
difficulties these athletes may endure throughout the competition. First, they may exhibit
an increased athletic identity during the tournament due to the increased media attention
and pressures to perform. Second, when they leave the competition to return to their
respective institutions, they may be faced with an increase workload in school due to the
amount of classes missed for travel and competition. From these speculations, it should
come as no surprise that Division-I student-athletes perceive achievement in athletics as
most important.

In addition, results showed significant gender differences in perceived importance
of achievement in athletics and achievement in academics. Male student-athletes rank
achievement in athletics as most important while female student-athletes perceive
achievement in academics as most important. It may be, for example, that since female
student-athletes compete within a masculine model of athletics, they may place more
emphasis on academic pursuits. Also, since there are minimal opportunities for females
to compete at the professional level, they may shift their focus to their career after sport
participation sooner than male athletes. It is likely that male student-athletes, competing
in a male model of sport may be culturally primed to place a greater emphasis in
achievement in athletics than achievement in academics.

The results of this study provide a glimpse into the life satisfaction of current
NCAA student-athletes. Previous research concerning athletic identity and life
satisfaction has been conducted retrospectively with “retired” athletes and focused mainly
on the sport-termination process (Erpic, Wylleman, & Zupancic, 2004; Pearson &
Petitpas, 1990; Stephan, Bilard, Ninot, & Delignieres, 2003; Webb, Nasco, Riley &
Headrick, 1998). This study serves as a building block for future studies investigating
athletic identity in relation to life satisfaction in NCAA athletes and adds to the growing
body of literature concerning athletic identity. In addition, this study included an often-
neglected population of Division-III student-athletes. The inclusion of this specific
population may further illuminate the potential differences between various levels within
the NCAA. The current study found life satisfaction differed significantly by level of competition (see Table 3), in which Division-I student athletes reported higher life satisfaction than Division-III students. Further research should determine whether this heightened life satisfaction is based on objective reality or false perceptions.

**Study Limitations**

Though the current study yielded results that add new knowledge to the literature on athletic identity and the virtually unexplored area of athletes’ life satisfaction, there were some limitations. First, the data collected in the current study was self-reported by student-athletes. It is not possible to control for response biases or tell whether these estimates reveal objective reality or whether they are false perceptions. Secondly, the cross sectional design of the study limits the interpretation of the results because the survey represents a single point in time. In other words, student-athlete commitment to the athlete role and life satisfaction may vary during the course of their college season or career. A longitudinal study that assesses changes in athletic identity could provide a better understanding of its impact on life satisfaction. Since this study used a convenience sample, a large number of participants were identified at first year students. Thus, readers must interpret results of this homogenous sample with caution.

A final limitation to the current study addresses the lack of ethnic diversity among sample participants. Although athletes attended universities from several different geographic regions of the United States, very little variability was found in ethnic background.

**Future Research**

Future research should focus on specific student-athlete populations at high risk for the negative effects of having a strong athletic identity. As student-athletes, individuals must fulfill their role as student (maintaining a proper GPA in order to compete and comply with NCAA regulations) and athlete (performing to one’s best). The word “student-athlete” itself defines a duality of two identities, which supports role-conflict theory. However, other theorists state that as engagement of productive activities increases, a role enhancement-effect will occur, yielding higher levels of life satisfaction (Baker, Cahalin, Gerst, & Burr, 2005). It may be that the athletic identity/life satisfaction relationship could be depicted as an inverted “U” versus a linear relationship. In other
words, perhaps there is an optimal level of athletic identity, which exhibits high life satisfaction.

Research has shown that student-athletes who become over committed to their athlete role and exhibit high athletic identity may be more susceptible to role-conflict within academics and it would be more appropriate to label such individuals as “athlete-students” (Danish et al., 1993). “Athlete-students” also run the risk of premature identity foreclosure, which may confound issues of role strain. Additional findings suggest that individuals who exhibit high athletic identity scores and experience difficulties in academic endeavors, tend to de-emphasize their student role in favor of the athlete role (Killeya, 2001). The results of the current study support the theory of role conflict, however; future research should also investigate athletic identity in relation to role enhancement theory.

Another suggestion for future research includes assessing the magnitude and type of stressors most commonly encountered by student-athletes. Recall that the most frequent stressor reported by this sample was an increase in workload at school (84%), followed by a change in sleeping habits (60%). Research also shows a potential relationship between reported stress and sleep patterns. Hudd et al. (2000) found that highly stressed students are less likely to report satisfactory sleeping patterns than low stressed students. For the athletes in this sample, results indicated significant relationships between stress and change in sleeping habits \(r(251) = .596, p = .01\), stress and increase in workload at school \(r(251) = .295, p = .01\), and change in sleeping habits and increase in workload at school \(r(251) = .265, p = .01\). It can be speculated that for the student-athletes in this sample, regardless of perceived importance of academic or athletic pursuits, a majority of them experience academic stress, which potentially could lead to a change in sleeping habits and in turn hurt academic and athletic performance. Future researchers should focus on the magnitude of explicit stressors within this specific population by using qualitative techniques to understand stressful events for student-athletes.

Although no significant gender differences were found in regards to athletic identity or life satisfaction, additional analyses found significant differences in perceived importance of academics and athletics between male and female student-athletes.
Research has found that in general, female student-athletes experience more role conflict than male-student athletes (Lance, 2004). Specifically, Lance (2004) found that male student-athletes tend to feel role conflict within the academic domain, whereas female student-athletes tend to feel role conflict in the athletic domain. Future research should examine the processes involved in the formation of athletic identity. One factor that should be investigated is the inter-play of cultural gender roles now that females have more opportunities for athletic participation. Male athletes have largely dominated the American athletic culture leaving little room for professional opportunities for females. As this changes with the growth of women's sports, future research should focus on how uniquely different women experience sport within a changing model.

Lastly, future research should begin to incorporate collegiate athletes of varying levels of competition. Historically, Division-III athletes have been a neglected population, with researchers preferring to conduct investigations with “elite” Division-I athletes. Division-III student-athletes are often overlooked. By including more Division-III athletes in research, a more complete understanding of student-athletes could be compiled. In many ways the experience of the Division-I student athlete can be expected to differ from that of the Division-III student-athlete. However; this difference may be influenced by the goals and values of the dominant model that tend to promote and encourage a strong identification to their athlete role.

**Practical Implications**

The results from this study can provide practical implications for current student-athletes. Results from Hypothesis Two illustrated that athletic identity significantly differed between Division-I and Division-III student athletes. Specifically, Division-I student-athletes reported higher athletic identity scores than Division-III student-athletes. Since having a high athletic identity has been shown to lead to potential negative effects, it is imperative to identify athletes who may be at risk, in order to help eliminate dysfunctional commitment to the athlete role. The results from this study suggest that Division-I student-athletes may be at a higher risk for “over commitment” to the athlete role. Coaches and administrators can help in identifying “high risk” athletes, who exhibit strong athletic identity, and refer them to the proper counseling/academic staff.
Life satisfaction also differed significantly between Division-I and Division-III student-athletes. Specifically, Division-I student-athletes reported higher life satisfaction scores than Division-III student-athletes. Since Division-I student-athletes from the current study differed significantly in athletic identity and life satisfaction compared to Division-III student-athletes, one might ask “who is doing it right?” The answer to this question could differ from athlete to athlete. An athlete who possesses a high athletic identity may find increased satisfaction with life within a Division-I athletic program, whereas a athlete who exhibits a moderate commitment to the athlete role may be more satisfied with life competing at a Division-III institution. This congruence with athletic identity and life satisfaction within a particular level of competition may aid in the college selection process for many incoming first year student-athletes.

In regards to student stress, results showed a significant negative relationship with life satisfaction. In other words, as stress increases, life satisfaction decreases. Specifically, recall the athletes’ in this study reported “an increase of workload at school” as the most frequently encountered stressor. These findings suggest that student-athletes in this sample endure some type of academic stress. Nearly half of the student-athletes in the current study reported stress scores exceeding the 300 standard in which there is a high risk of health change. For practitioners, it would be highly recommended to monitor student-athletes who report high stress scores since a subsequent decrease in health and life satisfaction is probable. By reducing the quantity of stressors experienced by student-athletes, it is suggested that significant decreases in life satisfaction could be avoided.

Female student-athletes reported significantly higher stress scores than male student-athletes. In addition, the mean stress score for females exceeded the 300 point standard for increased risk of health change. Gender specific programming could aid in decreasing stress for female student-athletes. Educational programming for female student-athletes could aid by bringing awareness to the gender/stress relationship as well as provide practical solutions for common female specific stressors. The primary emphasis of these programs should be to educate female student-athletes of this potentially harmful relationship and secondly, provide stress management techniques to implement when a stressful event may occur.
Differences in perceived importance between achievement in academics and achievement in athletics by level of competition demonstrated that Division-I student-athletes tend to be more “athletically” oriented than Division-III student-athletes. In addition, male student-athletes also tended to be more “athletically” oriented than female student-athletes. As Division-I student-athletes become increasingly enmeshed in a model that promotes achievement in athletics, it is not surprising that such a difference was found. In addition, since there are limited opportunities for females to compete at the professional level in comparison to males, it is logical that this gender difference exists. Perhaps Division-I institutions decrease the emphasis in non-sport related activities, thus promoting achievement in athletics over achievement in academics. Again, one might ask “who is doing it right?” It may be that Division-III athletic programs who de-emphasize achievement in athletics promote a better model for overall student development.
References


APPENDIX A

includes:

• Oral Script used with athletes
• Athlete consent form
Hello. My name is Megan Elasky. I am a graduate student in the PHS Department at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. I am here today to ask each of you to participate in a research study that Melissa Chase, Rose Marie Ward, (professors in the PHS department) and I are conducting to find out about your life satisfaction as a student-athlete.

To be a participant in this study, you will need to fill out a survey that consists of a number of questionnaires asking questions about your identity as an athlete, your life satisfaction as an athlete, your current ranking of priorities, and life events that have occurred within the last 12 months. Filling out this set of questionnaires should take you about 10 to 15 minutes.

You should know that no one outside of the research team will ever see your answers. We are not even asking you to tell us your name, your school’s name, your uniform number, or the position you play. Please do not write your name on any of the questionnaires so as to keep all responses anonymous. Thus no one (including ourselves) will be able to identify what answers you, as an individual athlete, provided to our questions.

We do hope to write a paper or papers describing the results of this study. These papers would be published in research journals, but your name and your school’s name would never be identified because we are not collecting this information.

It is also important for me to tell you that you do not have to participate in this study. That is, if you do not want to fill out the set of questionnaires, you do not have to do so. Also, if you start filling out the questionnaires and do not want to finish, you can quit at any time.

We would really appreciate your help with this study as we are trying to find out more about the life satisfaction of student-athletes. We are asking you, as athletes, this information because we believe that you are in the best position to tell us what it is like to be a student athlete. Thank you for your time.
Athlete Consent Form

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH
I understand that the purpose of this research is to gain an understanding of student’s commitment to their athletic role and overall quality of life. There are no right or wrong answers, only opinions.

SPECIFIC PROCEDURES TO BE USED
I understand that a graduate student, who is not connected to my sport in any way, will explain the project procedures to me. If I choose to participate, I will be given a survey to complete and then place in an envelope. I will not write my name on the survey. If I choose not to participate, I will not complete a survey and continue with scheduled activities.

DURATION OF PARTICIPATION
I understand that this is a one time only data collection. Participation should take about 15 to 20 minutes to complete the surveys and place completed surveys in the envelope.

BENEFITS TO THE INDIVIDUAL
I understand that there will be no benefits of any kind related to my current sport status. The research project and my current sport status are not related in any way or form. There are no direct benefits from participating in this research project.

CONFIDENTIALITY
I understand that my completed survey will remain confidential because I did not write my name on any forms. Once collected, my survey responses will be entered into a computer program for data analysis and then the survey will be destroyed, in a paper shredder. Any public reporting of data will occur as a reflection of the group response and not individual responses.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF PARTICIPATION
I understand that I do not have to participate in this research project. If I agree to participate I can withdraw my participation at any time without penalty. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty and I many refuse to answer specific questions without penalty.

Human Subject Statement
If I have any questions about this research project, I can contact Dr. Melissa Chase. I may contact the Office for the Advancement of Research and Scholarship (513-529-3734) for questions about my rights as participants or email humansubjects@muohio.edu if I have any questions or concerns regarding my rights as a participant in this research project.

I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO READ THIS CONSENT FORM, ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROJECT AND AM PREPARED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT.

________________________________  __________________________
Participant’s Signature  Date

________________________________  __________________________
Researcher’s Signature  Date
APPENDIX B

ATHLETES’ STUDY QUESTIONNAIRES

includes

- Demographic Questionnaire
- Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS)
- Brief Multidimensional Students’ Life Satisfaction Scale (BMSLSS)
  - Student Stress Scale (SSS)
  - Perceived Importance of Athletics and Academics
Demographic Questionnaire – Collegiate Athletes’ Survey

Instructions: Please fill out the following questionnaire, by checking, writing out, or circling your appropriate response.

1. Year: Fr_____ So_____ Jr_____ Sr_____ 5th year______
2. Gender: __________
3. Sport: ________________________________
4. Competitive Level: Division I___________ Division III_________
5. Age (in years): __________
6. Ethnic Affiliation (please check all that apply)
   _____American Indian or Alaska Native  _____Hispanic or Latino (Latina)
   _____Asian or Asian American  _____Native Hawaiian or other
       Pacific Islander
   _____Black, African American or Haitian  _____White (Caucasian)
       _____Other_________________________
7. Average number of hours per week spent in sport participation: _________________
8. What is your current level of enjoyment in your sport?
   7 6 5 4 3 2 1
   Very High  Moderate Very Low
9. Are you currently in season? _____ Yes _____ No
10. Are you currently competing? _____ Yes _____ No
11. On average, would you say you have more, less, or equal amounts of playing time than your teammates.
   7 6 5 4 3 2 1
   More Equal Less
12. During this season did you win more than 50% of your competitions (if you are still in season, currently, have you won more than 50% of your competitions thus far)?
    _____ Yes _____ No
Athletic Identity Questions

Instructions: Please answer the following questions regarding your athletic participation by circling your response in the space provided. Only circle one response per question.

1. I consider myself an athlete
   
   | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
   | Strongly Agree | Neutral | Strongly Disagree |

2. I have many goals related to sport
   
   | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
   | Strongly Agree | Neutral | Strongly Disagree |

3. Most of my friends are athletes
   
   | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
   | Strongly Agree | Neutral | Strongly Disagree |

4. Sport is the most important part of my life
   
   | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
   | Strongly Agree | Neutral | Strongly Disagree |

5. I spend more time thinking about sport than anything else
   
   | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
   | Strongly Agree | Neutral | Strongly Disagree |

6. I need to participate in sport to feel good about myself
   
   | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
   | Strongly Agree | Neutral | Strongly Disagree |

7. Other people see me mainly as an athlete
   
   | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
   | Strongly Agree | Neutral | Strongly Disagree |
8. I feel bad about myself when I do poorly in sport

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<th>4</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
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9. Sport is the only important thing in my life

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<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
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<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
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10. I would be very depressed if I were injured or could not compete in sport

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<td>Strongly Agree</td>
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<td>Neutral</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
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Life Satisfaction Questions

Instructions: Please answer the following questions regarding your overall satisfaction by circling your response in the space provided. Only circle one response per question.

1. I would describe my satisfaction with my family life as:
   a. Terrible
   b. Unhappy
   c. Mostly dissatisfied
   d. Mixed (about equally satisfied and dissatisfied)
   e. Mostly satisfied
   f. Pleased
   g. Delighted

2. I would describe my satisfaction with my friendships as
   a. Terrible
   b. Unhappy
   c. Mostly dissatisfied
   d. Mixed (about equally satisfied and dissatisfied)
   e. Mostly satisfied
   f. Pleased
   g. Delighted

3. I would describe my satisfaction with my school experience as:
   a. Terrible
   b. Unhappy
   c. Mostly dissatisfied
   d. Mixed (about equally satisfied and dissatisfied)
   e. Mostly satisfied
   f. Pleased
   g. Delighted

4. I would describe my satisfaction with myself as:
   a. Terrible
   b. Unhappy
   c. Mostly dissatisfied
   d. Mixed (about equally satisfied and dissatisfied)
   e. Mostly satisfied
   f. Pleased
   g. Delighted
5. I would describe my satisfaction with where I live as:
   a. Terrible
   b. Unhappy
   c. Mostly dissatisfied
   d. Mixed (about equally satisfied and dissatisfied)
   e. Mostly satisfied
   f. Pleased
   g. Delighted

6. I would describe my satisfaction with my overall life as:
   a. Terrible
   b. Unhappy
   c. Mostly dissatisfied
   d. Mixed (about equally satisfied and dissatisfied)
   e. Mostly satisfied
   f. Pleased
   g. Delighted
Student Stress Questionnaire

Instructions: Please indicate whether the following events have occurred in your life within the past twelve months, by checking either “yes” or “no”.

_____ Yes  _____ No  Death of a close family member
_____ Yes  _____ No  Death of a close friend
_____ Yes  _____ No  Divorce between parents
_____ Yes  _____ No  Placed on academic probation
_____ Yes  _____ No  Jail term
_____ Yes  _____ No  Major personal injury or illness
_____ Yes  _____ No  Marriage
_____ Yes  _____ No  Trouble with siblings
_____ Yes  _____ No  Firing from a job
_____ Yes  _____ No  Failure of an important course
_____ Yes  _____ No  Change in health of a family member
_____ Yes  _____ No  Inability to compete (due to factors other than injury or illness)
_____ Yes  _____ No  Pregnancy
_____ Yes  _____ No  Sex problems
_____ Yes  _____ No  Serious argument with close friend
_____ Yes  _____ No  Serious argument with teammate
_____ Yes  _____ No  Change in financial status
_____ Yes  _____ No  Change of major
_____ Yes  _____ No  Trouble with parents
_____ Yes  _____ No  Serious argument with coach
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<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<td>New girlfriend or boyfriend</td>
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<td>Increase in workload at school</td>
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<td>Outstanding personal achievement</td>
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<td>Abortion</td>
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<td>First quarter/semester in college</td>
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<td>Change in living conditions</td>
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<td>Serious argument with an instructor</td>
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<td>Change in status on team</td>
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<td>Lower grades than expected</td>
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<td>Change in sleeping habits</td>
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<td>Change in social activities</td>
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<td>Rape or sexual assault</td>
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<td>Change in eating habits</td>
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<td>Chronic car trouble</td>
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<td>Change in the number of family get-togethers</td>
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<td>Too many missed classes</td>
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<td>Change of college</td>
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<td>Dropping of more than one class</td>
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<td>Minor traffic violations</td>
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Perceived Importance of Athletics and Academics

Instructions: Please rank the following 14 items, with “1” representing the most important currently and “14” representing least important currently.

_____ Achievement in academics
_____ Achievement in athletics
_____ Feeling good about my personal performance
_____ Feeling good about myself outside of sport
_____ Getting the maximum amount of “play” time during competition
_____ Having a good relationship with the coach
_____ Having a romantic partner
_____ Keeping in shape
_____ Maintaining interpersonal relationships with teammates
_____ Maintaining interpersonal relationships with classmates
_____ Making money
_____ Spiritual development
_____ Using my college major for work purposes after graduation
_____ Winning