A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE RECRUITMENT EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN
STUDENT-ATHLETES AND THE FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE COLLEGE CHOICE

Breanna C. Robinson

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Committee:

Amanda L. Koba, Committee Co-Chair

Christina J. Lunceford, Committee Co-Chair

Michael J. Zickar
Graduate Faculty Representative

Maureen E. Wilson

ABSTRACT

Amanda L. Koba, Committee Co-Chair

Christina J. Lunceford, Committee Co-Chair

For prospective college student-athletes, college selection is a multifaceted process that often involves athletic recruitment and is different from a traditional student exploring college options. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the recruitment experiences of women participating in intercollegiate athletics and the factors that were most influential to their college choice. This study used Perna's (2006) Proposed Model of College Choice and Magnusen et al.'s (2014) Social Influence Model of College Choice as theoretical frameworks to understand the essence of women student-athletes' lived experiences related to recruitment and college choice.

Ten women student-athletes who were 18 years or older and played Division I field hockey or volleyball at NCAA member institutions participated in the study. Each participant engaged in two, 60-90-minute semi-structured interview sessions. Following interviews, data were transcribed and verified by participants for accuracy before being coded to identify themes.

The findings from this research show that coaches and parents serve in the capacity of influential agents, resources, and/or supports to women student-athletes throughout the recruitment process. Results also showed that academics and team culture were highly valued institutional factors that dictated the college decisions of women student-athletes. Moreover, there are factors that are internal and external to the institution that are most salient to women student-athletes' college choice.

I dedicate this work to my beautiful, charismatic, inquisitive, kind-hearted, gracious Harper. You

have given me the greatest gift in this world, the blessing of being your mother. Time and again,

you have challenged and inspired me to better my best when I thought it to be impossible to give

any more. I am forever indebted. Without your love, encouragement, and understanding, there

are no career moves or promotions, there is no dissertation, and there is certainly no doctorate.

Thank you for being patient with me throughout this journey. This accomplishment is ours to

relish in together. I am because of you, and I love you infinitely.

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CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

College recruitment is a multi-billion dollar industry. Marketing and advertisement, staff, data systems and purchased lists, travel, and admissions events drive this cost and as these costs shift, so too does the cost of tuition and fees and operating budgets (Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2018). Equally as important is student and institutional "fit." It is important that higher education professionals recruit students who will be successful at their respective institution and students choose the right school for their success. Due to economic markets and shifts in the age of college-going students (Renn & Reason, 2013), there is an increased need to be mindful of cost, efficiency, and effectiveness of marketing and recruitment strategies (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Pulliam & Sasso, 2016). The sense of urgency to adopt more efficient enrollment management practices is higher in states such as Ohio, Michigan, and Indiana as they face rapidly declining enrollments (Coccari & Javalgi, 1995; Kline, 2019).

As students prepare to make decisions about pursuing higher education, there are a myriad of factors that influence their college choice (Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989, Chapman, 1981; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Prospective college students consider affordability, the application process, social capital, moral support, prestige of a degree, and social fit when narrowing down factors that are most central to choosing an institution of higher education (Bergerson, 2009; Hossler et al., 1989; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Perna, 2006). Although socioeconomic status, social capital, and cultural capital have been identified in numerous studies as being integral to students choosing an institution that suits their academic, financial, and social needs, an in-dept study of gender and people who help with college selection have yet to be researched extensively. Moreover, existing literature has yet to delve into how the lived experiences of student-athletes affect college choice (Magnusen et al., 2014), predictors of

success, and persistence (Carter-Francique et al., 2013; Carter-Francique et al., 2015). The purpose of this study is to explore the recruitment experiences of women student-athletes participating in intercollegiate athletics and the factors that influence their college choice. In researching this topic, I explored the ways in which recruitment experiences affected college choice. In efforts to create context and appropriately frame the phenomenon, college choice, I provide the following definition of terms. The terms relevant to this study are:

- **Athletic Recruitment**: the practice of university representatives seeking out high school student-athletes to play sports at their institution (NCAA, 2021)

- **Autonomy 5 Schools**: institutions that are members of the five largest athletic conferences and have autonomy to adopt legislation that address challenges and matters related to student-athlete scholarship, academic support, and other forms of support (Shannon, 2018)

- **College Choice**: the multistage process of selecting a college, including but not limited to, aspirational thoughts and attitudes about attending college as well the process of searching for and selecting a college to attend (Chapman, 1981; Hossler et al., 1989; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987)

- **Division I**: a group of member schools that have the largest student bodies, manage the largest athletics budgets and offer the most generous number of scholarships (NCAA, 2021)

- **Enrollment Management**: the strategies and practices associated with recruiting (Pulliam & Sasso, 2016), admitting, retaining, and graduating students at a university (Duniway, 2012)

- **<u>Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS)</u>**: institutions that meet the Division I membership requirements; sponsor at least 16 varsity intercollege sports (six all male or mixed teams and eight all female teams); schedule 60 percent of competitions against other FBS schools; average at least 15,000 in attendance over a two-year period; provide an average of 90 percent of maximum football scholarships over a two-year period; and annually offer a minimum of 200 athletic scholarships to student-athletes in athletic programs (NCAA, 2014).

- **<u>Intercollegiate Athletics</u>**: for the purpose of this study, intercollegiate athletics focuses on a department that oversees NCAA sponsored sports at the Division I level (NCAA, 2021)

- **<u>National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)</u>**: an organization comprised of 1,098 colleges and universities and 102 athletic conferences in the United States that is dedicated to the well-being and lifelong success of college athletes and governs the rules of policies of college sports (NCAA, 2021)

- **<u>NCAA Women's Sports</u>**: I use "women's sports" to be consistent with the NCAA terminology. Women athletes are defined by the NCAA (2021) as individuals who compete and participate on these teams given the categorization of teams. Current NCAA women's sports are: basketball, bowling, cross country, field hockey, golf, gymnastics, ice hockey, indoor track and field, lacrosse, outdoor track and field, rowing, soccer, softball, swimming and diving, tennis, volleyball, and water polo

- **<u>Social identity</u>**: refers to an individuals' sense of self based on qualities used to categorize and associate within groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979)

- **<u>Social Capital</u>**: benefits gained by individuals' relationships that enhance connectivity within networks and communities (Putnam, 2000; Wang et al., 2012)

- **<u>Recruitment</u>**: the process of higher education professionals seeking and inviting students to attend an institution of higher education (NCAA, 2021; Pulliam & Sasso, 2016)

- **<u>Retention</u>**: the continued enrollment of students at the same college or university for consecutive terms after initial enrollment (*National Student Clearing House Research Center Snapshot Report*, 2015)

- **<u>Woman</u>**: the relationship between a person's internal sense of self as female as well as one's outward presentations and behaviors related to that perception (NCAA, 2012).

Statement of the Problem

There is a gap that exists in research on the college choice process for student-athletes. Moreover, research about college choice and recruitment is limited predominantly to male student-athletes from high profile athletic teams with a focus on revenue generation within college athletics (Andrew et al., 2016; Judson et al., 2004; Magnusen et al., 2014; Magnusen et al., 2018; Turick & Koba, 2017). Little is known about what factors are most salient to women student-athletes when selecting a postsecondary institution, and women's athletic teams comprise 50% of sports sponsored by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) (Andrew et al., 2016; Magnusen et al., 2018). Studying college choice and recruitment experiences of women student-athletes can enhance the knowledge and awareness of predictors of success (Houston, 2020), improve attrition (Carter-Francique et al., 2013), and help higher education professionals working in athletics and enrollment management to understand lived experiences of student-athletes alike (Popp et al., 2011). Additional research on this topic also provides an opportunity to gain insights about the interests of women student-athletes in efforts

to create more accountability for coaches and administrators and promote inclusive and equitable recruitment opportunities in intercollegiate athletics (Belanger, 2016).

Current literature has also served as a resource to coaches to get early verbal commitments of student-athletes (Magnusen et al., 2014; Pauline, 2010). Previous research has been a resource to coaches because it has examined college choice from the perspective of the recruiter (Magnusen et al., 2014; Siefried, 2007). A lack of broad research limits the insights of athletic support staff members who can be helpful resources for student-athletes (Carter-Francique et al., 2015) who are making a choice among colleges (Hossler et al., 1989). Limited research also inhibits the knowledge of higher education professionals who are committed to helping student-athletes access institutions that will best suits their needs academically, socially, and athletically (Hochradel et al., 2015; Magnusen et al., 2014). Broadening the scope of research about college choice provides opportunities for higher education professionals to serve as collaborative partners and supports to prospective student-athletes by understanding the aspects of recruitment that are most influential during the college selection process (Hochradel, Youssef, & Segars, 2015; Magnusen et al., 2014; Pauline, 2010).

Literature exists that discusses the role of mentors and familial support during recruitment (Magnusen et al., 2014; Magnusen et al., 2018; Pulliam & Sasso, 2016). However, there is a lack of breadth and depth about literature that acknowledges the role of institution-wide supports and partners in student-athlete recruitment (Carter-Francique et al., 2013; Carter-Francique et al., 2015). More specifically, there is little mention of ways in which sport administrators, academic support professionals, athletic trainers, and coaches serve as resources to woman student-athletes as they search and decide on a college (Bejou & Bejou, 2012; Burns et al., 2013). Additional illustrations of existing gaps are present in Magnusen et al.'s (2014)

synthesis of factors associated with college choice in student-athletes in which researchers introduce a social model for recruiting. Within this model, the role of recruiter is tabbed as a key influencer who has the ability, with proper strategies, to impact the student-athlete recruitment process, positively or negatively. Although the model approaches choice from an athletic perspective, it does not account for influences external to people nor does it acknowledge people outside of coaches and guardians who influence the recruitment and choice processes (Magnusen et al., 2014). Further research on student-athletes' college choice would increase knowledge for the purpose of developing strategies for effective enrollment management (Bejou & Bejou, 2012; Duniway, 2012). Furthermore, additional research will provide perspectives about ways in which the student-athlete population arrives at a college decision.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the recruitment experiences of women participating in intercollegiate athletics and the factors that are most influential to their college choice. The NCAA defines gender as a relationship between physical traits and one's internal sense of self as male, female, both, or neither, as well as one's outward presentations and behaviors related to that perception. Gender is not inherently associated to physical anatomy (NCAA, 2012). Having knowledge of the factors that influence women student-athletes' college choice can provide context to better improve recruitment practices. In turn, athletic departments and universities will be armed with data to inform recruitment practices and more efficient use of resources (Bejou & Bejou, 2012; Duniway, 2012; Hochradel, Youssef, & Segars, 2015). Furthermore, gaining insights about a subset of the student-athlete population to add to the existing body of work can assist in developing a theoretical framework to shape best practices for recruitment that apply to student-athletes regardless of gender (Judson et al., 2004).

Significance of the Study

As it pertains to insights, understanding lived experiences of student-athletes during recruitment is necessary to provide comprehensive and educational information that can be used to make an informed college decision. Despite coaches' beliefs, some research suggests that student-athletes involved in intercollegiate athletics primarily base their college choice on athletic-related factors. Available academic support has influenced student motivation and success; however, it has not been openly discussed during the recruitment process (Huffman & Cooper, 2012; Judson et al., 2004). Although studies such as these are helpful in understanding some student-athletes' experiences, the use of football and basketball in many studies and limited representation of student-athletes who play other sports make it difficult to understand greater phenomena that may exist with student-athletes' college choice as a whole. Delving into the factors that influence the college choice of student-athletes from athletic teams other than football and basketball is integral to financial implications for institutions and athletic departments (Bejou & Bejou, 2012; Pulliam & Sasso, 2016; Schneider & Lin, 2011).

When considering the cost to recruit a student-athlete, administration must also consider the cost of attrition and loss of federal funding when student-athletes transfer (Duniway, 2012; Pulliam & Sasso, 2016; Schneider & Lin, 2011). According to the NCAA *Revenues & Expenses Report* (2017), the median revenue generated by Football Bowl (FBS) Subdivision Division I athletic programs collectively in 2016 was approximately $50,000,000. Of the revenue reported, the institutions generated about $31,000,000 from ticket sales, support from alumni, conference distributions, advertising and sponsorships, broadcasting rights, endowments, and investments (NCAA, 2017). While these data points do not detail the revenue discrepancy between upper and

lower level FBS institutions, there are negative financial implication of attrition on athletic department revenue (Dohrn & Reinhardt, 2014; Schneider & Lin, 2011).

In acknowledging the absence of representation within the research about college choice across sports, another significant problem is the limited number of studies about college choice that include perspectives and experiences of women student-athletes (Andrew et al., 2016). More recent research by Magnusen et al. (2018) has explored recruiting effectiveness using women's basketball student-athletes. Other research has examined the factors that affect college choice of student-athletes at large and mid-sized institutions and discovered that there were differences by gender in factors that students found to be most influential in choosing an institution of higher education (Judson et al., 2004). However, research on the factors that influence college choice (Andrew et al., 2016; Goss et al., 2006) showed that no significant differences existed in college choice factors based on gender. While quantitative studies are valuable in providing perspectives on issues regarding college choice, qualitative research is valuable to understand why student-athletes value certain factors more than others when selecting a college or university (Pauline, 2010; Popp et al., 2011). Moreover, being equipped with more information about college choice and recruitment experiences of student-athletes who are women could assist university athletic departments in providing the necessary resources for women and address issues pertinent to gender equity in sports (Fabrikant, 2018; Golden, 2016).

Recognizing the discrepancy in representation of athletic teams and gender in the research is only part of the problem in fully understanding recruitment experiences and factors that influence college choice of student-athletes. More specifically, current research is limited on the recruitment experiences of student-athletes and the ways in which their recruitment experiences influence choice (Hochradel et al., 2015; Pauline, 2010; Schaeperkoetter, 2015). The

literature that currently exists focuses heavily on the student-athlete as the decision-maker (Letawsky et al., 2003). It also focuses on coaches' perceptions of recruiting (Flett et al., 2010) and does not take into consideration student-athletes' perceptions of coaches' behaviors that may play a role in college choice of student-athletes (Andrew et al, 2016; Judson et al., 2004; Magnusen et al., 2014; Vermillion, 2012). Moreover, current research targets experiences of domestic student-athletes as opposed to international student-athletes (Popp et al., 2011).

From a theoretical perspective, there is an abundance of research on choice theory and empowering students in relation to academic goals, but there is a noticeable discrepancy in the studies on college choice in relation to student-athletes, women, or international students (Magnusen, 2014; Perna, 2000; Schaeperkoetter et al., 2015). Studies on college choice have been primarily undertaken from the approaches of family systems theory and marketing (Judson et al., 2004; Letawsky et al., 2004). Understanding different college choice models, and the rationale behind the choices that student-athletes make can be helpful to higher education on a larger level as it could inform how practitioners work with student-athletes as they transition into college as well as assist with retention and persistence (Bejou & Bejou, 2012; Duniway, 2012; Pulliam & Sasso, 2016).

Approaching this study from a qualitative perspective is beneficial given the limited qualitative research that exists as it pertains to women student-athletes' college choice, specifically in relation to recruitment (Chard & Potwarka, 2017; Schaeperkoetter et al., 2015). Additionally, research that exists highlights the student-athlete experience (Houston, 2019; Huml & Foster, 2017; Letawsky et al., 2003) but does not provide an all-encompassing view of the issue and has not consistently addressed variances in college choice by sport or gender. In the same fashion, it does not outline the financial implications for an institution if student-athletes

are misinformed or misjudges institutional fit (Andrew et al., 2016; Judson et al., 2004; Magnusen et al., 2014; Magnusen et al., 2018). Qualitative research methods best suit this study as it helps to better understand experiences and underlying values and beliefs (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) of student-athletes in arriving at their choice as well as the interactions that they have had that serve as influencers throughout the choice process. Moreover, the proposed study focuses on the role that coaches have in recruitment and college choice through student-athletes' perspectives and contributes to existing research on college choice by providing insight to professionals working in intercollegiate athletics and higher education about experiences of student-athletes deciding on a college and predictors of college success (Dohrn & Reinhardt, 2014; Pulliam & Sasso, 2016; Schneider & Lin, 2011).

Scope of the Study

This study included a qualitative approach to explore the recruitment experiences of women student-athletes participating in intercollegiate athletics and the factors that influence their college choice. The institutions selected were members of the NCAA, which is the national governing body of intercollegiate athletic teams in the United States and responsible for interpreting, enforcing, and supporting association legislation and managing programs that promote student-athlete well-being. Additionally, student-athletes who participated in this study were women who were on rosters of athletic teams funded and sponsored by the athletic departments at their respective institutions. Moreover, members of these teams are from various regions of the world. It is important to note that this study focused on women student-athletes for the purpose of aligning the NCAA's classification of sports with institutions' athletic teams. It is also necessary to acknowledge that the term "woman" is a gender that does not account for biological characteristics of an individual.

This study uses two theoretical frameworks, Perna's (2006) Proposed Model of College Choice and the Social Influence Model on College Choice (Magnusen et al., 2014), to serve as a guide for the research. Perna's (2006) Proposed Model of College Choice approaches college choice from a sociological and economic lens, and is designed to help understand who or what influences the recruitment process for women and also highlight the ways in which supports aided student-athletes in arriving at a decision. Similarly, the Social Influence Model on College Choice (Magnusen et al., 2014) takes a sociological approach but places emphasis on the athletic program, academics, and external factors as being influential. I used this model as a part of my theoretical framework to understand which institutional qualities matter most when selecting a university. Collectively, both models were relevant to understand the components of the recruitment process that are most salient to women student-athletes.

Research Questions

In preparing to research the recruitment experiences of women student-athletes and the factors that influence their college choice, my research question was: *What is most salient to women student-athletes' college choice?* Additional questions were:

1. Which individual(s) are essential resources to women during the recruitment process, and what specific roles do they play in college selection?

2. Which institutional factors are most important to student-athletes in deciding which university to attend, and why?

Chapter One provided a basis for understanding the problem and purpose of this research about women student-athletes' experiences with recruitment related to college choice. The research questions frame the research and set the foundation for the literature review in Chapter Two. The literature review provides context to better understand enrollment

management in higher education in relation to the economics, recruitment, and retention. Additionally, Chapter Two delves into the nuances of economics of college athletics, student-athlete recruitment, and models of college choice that inform this work. Chapter Three details the theoretical frameworks, research paradigm, and methods used to conduct the study. Chapter Four addresses the research findings in relation to the research questions and theoretical frameworks, and Chapter Five is a discussion of the findings, theoretical implication, practical implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study is to understand which factors are most salient to women collegiate student-athletes when selecting a college. Additionally, the purpose of this study is to better understand which aspects of the recruitment process are the most meaningful when student-athletes make a college choice. Having more knowledge about student-athletes' recruitment experiences and college choice will provide insight to postsecondary institutions as they determine resource allocation within enrollment management (Duniway, 2012; Perna, 2006; Pulliam & Sasso, 2016). Enrollment management is a process that involves regulating recruitment, admission, application, retention, and persistence of students at an institution. Effective enrollment management is critical to a university's ability to generate revenue needed to afford operational expenses (Duniway, 2012). According to the *Cost of Recruiting an Undergraduate Student Report* (Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2018), the average cost to recruit a domestic undergraduate student in the middle third of a recruiting class at a private university is $2,357, while it costs about $536 to recruit students in the median at public institutions. Therefore, the cost to recruit an incoming class of approximately 4,000 students is about $9,428,000.

The financial losses suffered by institutions due to attrition increases the need for context about enrollment management and institutional fit. In fall 2019, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that the average retention rate for full-time undergraduate students at 4-year institutions was about 80%. Financially, this equates to $1,885,600 lost by universities and negatively impacts institutions' operating budgets. Understanding perspectives of student-athletes will inform coaches about how to have more purposeful interactions with student-athletes during the recruiting and college selection processes and provide perspective to

institutions on ways to be more efficient with enrollment management resources (Magnusen et al., 2014).

This literature review will provide context to the research topic by giving an overview of enrollment management and delving deeper into the financial aspects of student recruitment, retention, and attrition. Furthermore, this review of literature will provide critical perspectives about revenue generation in intercollegiate athletics and review Chapman's Model of Influences on Student College Choice (1981), Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) College Choice Model, Perna's (2006) Proposed Model of College Choice, and Magnusen et al.'s (2014) Social Influence Model of College Choice. Finally, in exploring economic components of college athletics, I will investigate the historical foundations of Title IX in relation to recruitment and college choice for women participating in intercollegiate athletics present day.

Enrollment Management

According to Thelin and Gasman (2011), the purpose of U.S. higher education has traditionally been to generate knowledge while also serving as a source that provides context to historical data. Historically, the reputation of U.S. four-year higher education institutions has been to create and disseminate new knowledge and serve as a repository for existing and historical knowledge (Thelin & Gasman, 2011). Universities rely on enrollment of students to thrive and be financially sustainable. Effective enrollment management consists of accurate benchmarking, efficient recruitment efforts, and retention of students (Duniway, 2012; Holley & Harris, 2010). The use of benchmarking is a critical method of measurement that allows institutions to evaluate performance and identify insufficiencies to address challenges as well as opportunities (Duniway, 2012). Benchmarks provide scope to enrollment management, allowing institutions to clearly identify functions that need adjustment to meet enrollment goals.

Evaluating application and admission rates, scholarships and financial aid, and graduation and retention rates permit institutions to gauge needs and resources available to correct deficiencies (Duniway, 2012; Holley & Harris, 2010).

Economics of Enrollment Management

Enrollment management is focused on students' college choice as it pertains to financial aid opportunities that affect admission, enrollment, retention, and persistence (Duniway, 2012; Slim et al., 2018). In 2019, the NCES reported approximately 20 million students enrolled in colleges and universities, indicating a 5% decrease in college enrollment since 2010 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). "Emerging populations that have been heavily recruited include historically underrepresented populations of low-income, first-generation, and additional minority groups" (Pulliam & Sasso, 2016, p. 1). Although the increased representation of traditionally underrepresented populations in higher education is positive, connecting with students during recruitment and retention following enrollment have continued to present problems (Pulliam & Sasso, 2016). To compound this issue, there has been a steady decrease in enrollment numbers (Kline, 2019).

Acknowledging the economic disparities in opportunities for students who aspire to pursue higher education is important since there are increased costs associated with recruitment and retention efforts depending on students' level of academic preparedness (Blagg & Blom, 2018). Figures shared earlier in this chapter describe costs to employ enrollment management personnel used to recruit first-time enrollees who are domestic students (Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2018). Higher costs are incurred when recruiting transfer students and international students. The *Cost to Recruit an Undergraduate Student Report* indicated that the median cost to recruit a transfer student to a private 4-year institution is $312, while the cost at a public university is $46.

Median costs to recruit international students range between $735 and $325 (Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2018). Understanding the student population being recruited is invaluable to institutions' recruitment and retention efforts but also to understanding the impact of their return on investment (Dunway, 2012; Pulliam & Sasso, 2016).

Although previous studies have identified academic offerings and institutional reputation as being the most meaningful predictors of college choice, affordability is also a significant factor (Duniway, 2012; Magnusen et al., 2014; Pauline, 2010). Recruitment, admission, and enrollment are related to institutions' ability to expend resources and provide opportunities to prospective students (Duniway, 2012; Pulliam & Sasso, 2016). Affordability is made possible by major gifts to universities in the forms of endowments and state monies to fund institutions. In a similar way, this is how institutions maintain high-quality academic programs (Duniway, 2012).

Recruitment and Retention in Athletics

Individuals seeking athletic recruitment in pursuit of continuing their academic and athletic careers in college are deemed as prospective student-athletes (PSAs) if they are at least in the ninth grade and not enrolled in college courses full-time (NCAA, 2021). Depending on NCAA sport recruiting calendars, PSAs may experience athletic recruitment through written correspondence in the form of letters, emails, and flyers during their first year of high school and make a verbal commitment between sophomore and senior years. For student-athletes who are highly touted, athletic recruitment can be extensive and grueling (Klenosky et al., 2001). Based on prior research and reports, larger institutions have financial resources to recruit and attract the best athletes and provide the most appealing scholarship offers (Bradbury & Pitts, 2017), and this increases competitive excellence. Discrepancies in facilities, cost-of-attendance, and support staff affect recruitment as well as retention (Bradbury & Pitts, 2017; Klenosky et al., 2001).

According to the *NCAA Revenue and Expenditures Report* (NCAA, 2019) the average amount institutions spend on athletics recruitment is $3,800,000 which amounted to 2 percent of their total operating budget for recruiting. The same report indicated that member institutions averaged approximately $19,000,000,000 in expenditures, with about $4,000,000,000 spent on tuition and scholarships. Lastly, the value of an athletic scholarship for student-athletes is between $70,000 and $200,000 (*National Center for Education Statistics*, 2019) depending on public or private institutions. While some of these numbers are skewed due to larger budget lines and expenditures at autonomy schools that generate considerably more revenue, the effect is all the same. The cost to recruit, educate, and retain student-athletes requires significant resources and serves as a tradeoff for institutions that use athletics to drive their brand (Watkins & Gozenbach, 2013).

The NCAA incentivizes academic success and retention of student-athletes through the use of a metric called, Academic Progress Rate (APR). APR uses a point system to track student-athlete eligibility and retention each term that serves as a measurement of academic achievement for institutions. There are rewards for member institutions who earn an overall Academic Progress Rate of 985 or higher, a Graduation Success Rate of 90% or higher, or a Federal Graduation Rate 13 points higher than the general student population at their institution. Institutions that have student-athletes who excel academically and retain student-athletes receive an additional revenue distribution from the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA, 2021). Whether the potential financial earnings for athletic departments across the country is enticing enough to effectively recruit and retain student-athletes is yet to be seen.

Economics of College Athletics

The economic circumstances for respective athletic departments vary by institution. Each department is funded differently depending on revenue structures. In some cases, departments serve as auxiliaries to their institutions and are funded by large endowments and sponsorships, while other units are supported by student fees and institutional support (Cheslock & Knight, 2015). Collectively, institutions that have opportunities to generate revenue externally and earn billions of dollars annually on media partnerships, sponsorships, ticket sales, and the sale of merchandise. As a result, some college athletic departments of institutions in larger athletic conferences need little help to operate and contribute to the financial well-being of institutions (Cheslock & Knight, 2015). Conversely, athletic departments that are not as prominent earn in the range of millions and challenge the operation of the university by requiring additional resources in light of increased subsidies at the institutional level while trying to provide quality, affordable education (Cheslock & Knight, 2015; Duniway, 2012; Weaver, 2011).

To this point, each year NCAA Division I colleges and universities of varying sizes allocate financial resources towards the recruitment of student-athletes (Cheslock & Knight, 2015; NCAA, 2017; Magnusen et al., 2014). In 2011, the average athletics expenditures for Association of American Universities (AAU) member institutions were $73.7 million compared to $42.2 million spent by non-AAU institutions (Cheslock & Knight, 2015). These expenditures continue to increase as institutions compete to be the best academically and athletically. However, the main difference is the dependency of schools in smaller athletic conferences on their institutions to subsidize athletic expenditures with student fees (Weaver, 2011). And regardless of financial resources, recruitment efforts are an investment that will be returned in

the form of donor support which increases funding departmentally and/or programmatically (Cheslock & Knight, 2015; Weaver, 2011).

College Choice

College choice is the general term used to describe the process of selecting a college (Chapman, 1981; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Exploring David Chapman's Model of Student College Choice (1981) and Don Hossler and Karen Gallagher's College Choice Model (1987) is the starting point for this study as they are critical foundation pieces that provide context to college choice and students seeking postsecondary education. Also, understanding elements of Constance Iloh's position on college selection is necessary to acknowledge the intersections of opportunity in relation to recruitment, privilege, and club sports. In the pages to come, I will expound upon Chapman's (1981) and Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) college choice models and Constance Iloh's Model of College-Going Decisions and Trajectories (2019). In addition to using foundational models to situate college choice, I will also use Perna's (2006) and Magnusen et al.'s (2014) work to situate the theoretical framework and highlight their relevance to the history of college choice and higher education today. Magnusen et al.'s (2014) model is relevant because it is grounded in experiences of student-athletes and athletic recruitment.

Student-Athlete Recruitment

The athletic recruitment process for student-athletes is similar to general college recruitment in many ways and at the same time nuanced and far more complex. Some prospective student-athletes begin preparing for recruitment early by researching institutions, their academic offerings, and athletic programs prior to the onset of their official recruitment (Feiner, 2015). On the other hand, coaches prepare for athletic recruitment by generating lists of top prospects, reviewing lists of athletes participating in camps and clinics, attending

tournaments for club sports teams, and connecting with club team directors and coaches (Koba, 2014). Student-athletes send emails expressing interest in schools and promoting their talent (Feiner, 2015) although these processes and procedures that are not always openly communicated (Hextrum, 2018). The potential harm to student-athletes and their families being uninformed during recruitment wasted time and financial resources, and inhibited forward movement, limiting access to athletic scholarships (Hextrum, 2018).

Individuals from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds have greater barriers because they have historically received limited access to opportunities for sport participation (Zarrett et al., 2018). One of the greater challenges in recent years has been college coaches' tendency to recruit prospective student-athletes from club sports teams as opposed to high school teams (Koba, 2014). To some families, the costs of participation fees, equipment, travel, hotel accommodations, and meals is a sacrifice they are able and willing to make for their child to be recruited while other families do not have the financial means. The inability to participate in club sports also impacts prospective student-athletes' access to club team coaches who are advocates during the recruitment process and college coaches who will invest in their future (Koba, 2014). Therefore, the issue of access is further exacerbated by a lack a social and cultural capital, limited exposure (Koba, 2014), the hidden curriculum, and unfamiliarity about the athletic recruitment process (Hextrum, 2018).

Chapman's Model of Influences on Student College Choice

In 1981, David Chapman proposed a model of student college choice that presented choice as being dependent on a student's individual characteristics and external factors. Specifically, Chapman's model (1981) theorized that individual characteristics along with external characteristics, serve as influencers on students' decisions to pursue higher education.

However, the model does not acknowledge time in reference to how students experience choice. Within the model, individual characteristics, such as socioeconomic status, natural ability, academic achievement, and aspirations to pursue higher education are indicators of the type of institutions that students will enter and the rate at which they will pursue secondary education (Chapman, 1981). Furthermore, the model illustrates that these characteristics, along with external factors, serve as influences on behaviors and beliefs about higher education, and they contribute to the ways in which students make meaning of college and formulate expectations (Chapman, 1981). Additionally, the model includes illustrations of aptitude and academic achievement as predictors for college choice because students more commonly select institutions reflective of their academic profiles. Instead of categorizing patterns of behavior by age, the model includes general stages defined by actions associated with choice factors rather than time periods (Chapman, 1981).

Although, individual factors are significant within this framework, external factors are equally meaningful to college choice. External influences are categorized into the following groups: influence of support system, characteristics of the institution such as cost to attend college and degree programs offered; and an institution's communication efforts during recruitment (Chapman, 1981). These characteristics are those outside of a student's control during the choice process and influence students' thoughts about accessibility of higher education. In summary, individual and external influences intersect and affect students' college choice, but the credibility of this model is rooted in students' ability to find an institution that best fits their needs (Chapman, 1981).

Hossler and Gallagher's College Choice Model

Hossler and Gallagher (1987) developed a three-stage model that described the process by which students come to decide whether they will pursue higher education. The model, which was termed the College Choice Process, posits that students experience a three-phase process that aids in choosing a college.

During the first phase, called predisposition, students consider their aspirations to pursue higher education. In this phase, students reflect on academic ability and parental expectations (Hossler et al., 1989; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Conversely, students formally explore college options during the search phase, and make a choice as to which school to attend during the choice phase (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Hossler, 1989). Although it is the least discussed phase, the predisposition phase is an integral phase throughout the college choice process since it begins as early as preschool and remains constant throughout high school. Additionally, this phase is a critical component of the model due to the relationship between academic achievement and aspirations to continue education (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Renn & Reason, 2013). It is also noted that indicators such as parental involvement, socioeconomic status, cultural norms, cultural capital, educators' expectations of students, university staff recruitment practices, and increased financial means affect students' decisions to consider higher education (Renn & Reason, 2013).

Historically, the aforementioned variables have been factors that moved students forward into the search phase or eliminated their interest in pursuing higher education altogether. Although the predisposition phase can be a deterrent to students, it has also proved to be a motivator that thrusts students into the search phase (Renn & Reason, 2013). During the search phase, students collect information and increase their knowledge base of the institutional options

and explore the possibilities of attending universities based on information available, affordability, and students' academic ability, to name a few (Hossler et al., 1989; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Renn & Reason, 2013). Once students gather information to make an informed decision, they move into the final phase, choice, which involves comparing institutions and making a college decision (Hossler et al., 1989; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987).

Iloh's Model of College-Going Decisions and Trajectories

Iloh's (2019) Model of College-Going Decisions and Trajectories is an ecological model that is distinctly different than earlier models of college choice because it disputes the idea that college attendance is a choice. Instead of reviewing predisposition, search, and choice, Iloh uses three dimensions: information, time, and opportunity to frame college-going (2019). More specifically, she understands information, time, and opportunity as being determinants of whether individuals successfully gain access to higher education.

According to Iloh (2019), the quality, quantity, source, and type of information provided to prospective students impacts their decision-making (Iloh, 2018). To this point, Iloh (2019) posits that information that is produced by institutions about college-going is shared in an inequitable manner in which interested parties have to know where to seek information, who to ask, and which questions to ask. This hoarding of information creates challenges to individuals who are unfamiliar with the college-going process and can be a barrier to access materials (Iloh, 2018; Iloh, 2019) during the search process that Hossler & Gallagher (1987) deem as an indicator of college selection.

The next dimension of this model, time, describes the chronological period of a person's life. This dimension creates context to individuals' exposure to and experiences with education in a similar yet different way that predisposition is presented in other models. In Iloh's Model of

College-Going Decisions and Trajectories (2019), she describes time in a variety of ways to make sense of the ways that connect to a person's predisposition to want to attend college. Micro-time is best described as real-time; it encapsulates what is happening in the moment, while macro-time is over the course of an individual's life. Macro-time provides perspective about events that occur over time that impact systems and society. Similar to macro-time, meso-time are events that happen over the course of a person's lifespan but are related to their personal life as opposed to the environment (Iloh, 2019). The understanding of time in Iloh's Model of College-Going Decisions and Trajectories goes deeper into understanding college selection, whereas other choice or decision-making models stop at the influence that societal changes have on an individual's experiences and may help frame how and why people view their pathway to college in a certain manner (Iloh, 2019).

The final dimension of this model is opportunity. Opportunity intersects with time and information to influence the possibility of college-going for students. This dimension encompasses availability of financial resources, family dynamics, location of home and school, and transportation. While older models detail the college selection process mention socioeconomic status and newer models also view college selection from an ecological perspective, Iloh's Model of College-Going Decisions and Trajectories (2019) specifies the impact that distinctive privilege can have on students' perceptions of college and their ability to achieve a goal such as attending college.

From a theoretical perspective, Iloh's (2019) model is different from previously designed frameworks because it declares that framing college as a "choice" is not always an accurate depiction of the process. Rather, Iloh explains that students' college-going is a result of information, time, and opportunity which are factors that vary depending on resources (Iloh,

2018; Iloh, 2019). In other words, students select an institution based on available options within the context of their environments and select a college to attend but may have limited choice. If information, time, and opportunities are scarce, then college options may be limited as well, which creates inequities for students with specific family dynamics- those who are not traditional college age, those from limited income homes, and those who attend under-resourced K-12 schools (Iloh, 2018; Iloh, 2019). Therefore, Iloh (2018; 2019) suggests that the college selection process is not completely at the vices of the students as much as it is codependent on individual circumstances of information, time, and opportunity.

Perna's Proposed Model of College Choice

In 2006, Perna proposed a new conceptual model of college choice to serve as a method to assess college choice. The model incorporates several factors as determinants of whether students will pursue higher education. Moreover, it positions college choice from a socioeconomic lens and places emphasis on human capital at various levels of the choice process. It also gives context to the resources that students utilize as decisions are made about postsecondary education (Perna, 2006).

In considering context, Perna's (2006) model acknowledges the importance of characteristics and factors at macro and micro levels that affect students making a college choice. Perna's (2006) model, similar to Chapman's (1981) Model of Influences on Student College Choice, focuses on the importance of context, identity, and behaviors over periods of time, as emphasized in Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) College Choice Model. Beginning at Level 4, the model identifies the relationship between policies, demographics, and economic circumstances as students think about higher education (Perna, 2006). In Level 3, higher education as it pertains to recruitment practices, locale, and institutional qualities are considered in relation to social,

economic, and policy factors. School and community are included in Level 2. Level 2 evaluates

human capital and barriers to accessing higher education that exist within high schools and

communities at-large (Perna, 2006). At Level 1, demographics, social capital, and cultural capital

influence students' perceptions of whether college is attainable, and it influences whether they

attempt college. At the highest level, this model displays the influence of socioeconomic

characteristics that effect resources that are useful to students when considering college. The

implications of not including this model as a foundational piece within my study leads along a

path of inequities in higher education (Perna, 2006).

Social Influence Model of College Choice

The Social Influence Model of College Choice (Magnusen et al., 2014) is a model that

addresses sociological aspects of recruitment through the quality of student-athletes' interactions

during the selection process. The model acknowledges the role of the recruiter and identifies

recruiter effectiveness as a critical influence on student-athletes' college choice. Additionally,

this model illustrates the ways that recruiters' social effectiveness characteristics, or abilities to

be diplomatic and/or social, assist in the identification, categorization, and implementation of

recruiting strategies (Magnusen et al., 2014). The implications of effective recruiting tactics

positively influence recruits and their perceptions of the institution and athletic program.

(Magnusen et al., 2014).

This model contends that positive interactions with prospective student-athletes and

influential agents, such as family, friends, and high school coaches, warrant positive perceptions

of the recruiter, which increase the likelihood of positive results for the recruiter (Magnusen et

al., 2014). Conversely, if prospective student-athletes and influential agents have negative

interactions with and perceptions of the recruiter, it increases the likelihood of negative

recruiting experiences warranting negative results for the recruiter (Magnusen et al., 2014).

As it relates to this model, influence strategies are divided into three categories: athletic

program factors, academic factors, and external factors. In the sections that follow, I discuss

Perna's (2006) Proposed Model of College Choice and Magnusen et al.'s (2014) Social Influence

Model on College Choice and why they work for my study.

Athletic Program Factors

During the recruitment process, student-athletes consider a myriad of factors as they

pertain to the athletic programs. Specifically, they contemplate opportunities to earn a

scholarship, play, and contribute to a team immediately. They also examine team cultures and

habits of the coaches for whom they will compete. Moreover, recruits evaluate athletic facilities

that serve as mechanisms to enhance their athletic ability and provide opportunities for further

development in honing their craft (Magnusen et al., 2014). Prior studies have shown that

facilities and physical representations of winning (e.g., trophies, championship rings, and

medals) serve as a more influential recruiting agents with male student-athletes, in particular

those who participate in football, as they more noticeable and tangible elements of success

(Dumond et al., 2008; Harris, 2018).

Academic Factors

Similar to athletic program factors, prospective student-athletes think through academic

aspects of an institution and consider majors that are available, academic prestige, and

opportunities for employment following graduation (Magnusen et al., 2014; Pauline, 2010). In

two respective studies led by Pauline (2008, 2010), softball and lacrosse student-athletes

indicated that academic offerings were one of the most important factors that impacted their

choice. Reputation of the institution and ability to gain employment post-graduation were also mentioned as top factors (Pauline et al., 2008; Pauline, 2010).

External Factors

When considering external factors, they are unlike the first two categories that are related to athletics and academics, as they are factors outside of the control of the institution. Geographic location, the economy, and weather conditions of universities fall within external factors. From a recruiting perspective, weather conditions do not tend to be as influential in decision-making for student-athletes, however location and economic conditions matter to families since financial resources are needed to travel to visit and attend athletic events (Magnusen et al., 2014).

Critique of Existing College Choice Models

The aforementioned models are useful in framing issues of college choice as during the 20th Century; however, some models have not been as useful in understanding recent trends in college selection given the increased diversity of students and special populations in higher education (Bergerson, 2009; Fierke, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Renn & Reason, 2013). Since Chapman proposed his model of student college choice in 1981, there has not been a continuous evolution of models to incorporate new aspects of the choice process. For example, in 1987, Hossler and Gallagher added to the body of work proposing that students experienced college choice in three phases of predisposition, search, and choice. And since 1987, there has not been a dominant model to lead the charge in better understanding college choice (Iloh, 2018; Perna, 2006).

Perna's (2006) Proposed Model of College Choice, the Social Influence Model of College Choice offered by Magnusen et al. (2014), and recommendations made by Constance

Iloh (2018; 2019) to move towards a new model of college choice make it possible to create a comprehensive model of college choice from an ecological perspective that connects with students from diverse backgrounds pursuing higher education (Iloh, 2018; Iloh, 2019). Perna's (2006) framework combined with Magnusen et al.'s (2014) model serve as a good starting point for reimagining the college selection process. Iloh's (2019) contributions to the college-going process are valuable because she accounts for the elements of privilege that are associated with having social and cultural capital. She does this by removing the concept of choice and presenting college selection as a result of information, time, and opportunity which are environmental determinants that impact access to college (Iloh, 2019). In the coming chapter, I will outline the research questions, research methods, and data analysis procedures used to conduct this study.

CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study of the college choice experience for women intercollegiate athletes. This study has the ability to assure efficiency in college recruitment and inform the ways in which universities can help support student-athletes' needs as they consider postsecondary education and persist towards graduation (Carter-Francique et al., 2013; Popp et al., 2011; Pulliam & Sasso, 2016). The purpose of this research was to examine the recruitment experiences of women participating in intercollegiate athletics and the factors that are most influential to their college choice. More specifically, this study focused on the recruitment experiences of women student-athletes who participate in Division I intercollegiate athletic programs at a mid-sized institution in the Midwest region of the United States.

Research Questions

Studying literature about the recruitment experiences of women in intercollegiate athletics and the factors that influence their college choice has allowed for the identification of the aforementioned disparities in current literature. Therefore, the primary research question is: *What is most salient to women student-athletes' college choice?*. Other related questions are:

1. Which individual(s) are essential resources to women during the recruitment process, and what specific roles do they play in college selection?

2. Which institutional factors are most important to student-athletes in deciding which university to attend, and why?

Methodology

I used a phenomenological approach and a social constructivist framework as I believe that reality is constructed through social interaction and individuals' lived experiences. Phenomenology is an approach that falls within the scope of constructivism and is used to

understand the meaning of individuals' lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). Furthermore, social

constructivism as a paradigm focuses on the reconstruction of knowledge through lived

experiences and understandings of the social contexts in which experiences occur (Denzin &

Lincoln, 2011). Within this study, intercollegiate athletics is the context in which the college

choice process was observed, and I sought to understand participants' experiences and how they

make meaning of their experiences.

The social constructivist framework is in line with my ontological belief that multiple

realities exist and can be constructed due to the unique experiences of individuals.

Epistemologically, meaning is shaped by the experiences of individuals, while reality is co-

constructed between the researcher and participants (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, I view my

position as a researcher as synonymous with an interpreter whose role is to seek to understand

experiences of participants and make sense of the "what, how, and why" within their realities.

This particular study was designed using a phenomenological approach because my research

goal was to understand how women student-athletes arrive at a college choice and whether

unique phenomena exist within the choice process based on sport and gender (Creswell, 2013).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that shaped this research was Perna's (2006) Proposed Model

of College Choice and Magnusen et al.'s (2014) Social Influence Model of College Choice.

Perna's (2006) Proposed Model of College Choice acknowledges the role of social and economic

factors in college choice. Moreover, this model acknowledges community, university, and social

structures that intersect with students' identities to influence choice (Perna, 2006). These

identities intersect within the context of government policies, school and living communities,

family systems, and race and gender. This model illustrates the choice process as dynamic,

continuous, and active, rather than stagnant and passive (Perna, 2006). Furthermore, it aligns well with the scope of my study to understand which institutional qualities are most salient to women student-athletes as well as how and why they influence college choice.

In addition to using Perna's (2006) proposed conceptual model of college choice, I used Magnusen et al.'s Social Influence Model on College Choice (2014). The Social Influence Model on College Choice (Magnusen et al., 2014) directly addresses college choice from a recruiting perspective. This model acknowledges the significance of social interactions between recruits, recruiters, and influential agents during the recruitment process, and it is beneficial to the scope of the study because it addresses my research questions of who is most influential during the recruitment process and why (Magnusen et al., 2014).

Phenomenological Research

Phenomenology is the essence of multiple individuals' experiences and the relationship that exists between lived experiences and perceptions (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). In designing a phenomenological study that explored the college choice of student-athletes, the goal was to identify whether a phenomenon exists among several individuals within a specific group (Creswell, 2013). Conducting a phenomenological study allows the researcher to understand how participants make meaning of their experiences by identifying themes in responses (Merriam, 2009). Similar to ethnographic research, phenomenological studies require the researcher to interact closely with participants to gain perspective as to whether a phenomenon actually exists. However, unlike critical theory, phenomenology does not seek to challenge or change social norms as much as it seeks to identify whether a problem exists within a specific context and the essence of the issue (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). Moreover, although data can be gathered through observation using a phenomenological approach,

interviews are valuable methods of data collection and were used to understand institutional qualities that are most salient to women student-athletes (Creswell, 2013). This approach was also best for learning who is most important to women during recruitment and why.

Participant Selection

Student-athletes from three respective women's athletic teams at three large, Division I institutions in the Midwest were invited to participate in the study. Participants were selected using purposeful sampling because it allowed participants to be chosen based on experiences related to the phenomenon being researched (Palinkas et al., 2015). Purposeful sampling allowed for comparisons to be made with a smaller sample while maintaining credibility by selecting individuals who had experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

Eligible participants were current student-athletes with remaining athletic eligibility on the roster of a women's field hockey, basketball, or volleyball team sponsored by the athletic department at an NCAA-member institution. Participants were also required to be 18 years of age or older, identify as a woman, and willing to discuss their athletic recruitment experiences as well as the process by which they determined college choice. The athletic teams must have been sponsored by the athletic department at Candor University and/or Victory State University (see Participant Eligibility Email in Appendix A). Pseudonyms were used for participants and institutions.

Upon beginning the research study, I intended to interview student-athletes from the women's field hockey, volleyball, and basketball teams at three institutions located in the Midwest to gain insights and perspectives of women across multiple sports that represent diversity in race, socioeconomic status, hometown, country of origin, language of origin, and athletic aid offerings to better understand similarities and differences in experiences. However,

emails at one institution were not publicly available to compile; therefore, the institution was eliminated from the study. Also, there were no members of women's basketball teams from the two institutions used to recruit participants who responded to the call for research participants. Solicitation for participants occurred through an e-mail to all student-athletes on respective teams to reduce the likelihood of selection bias (see Participant Recruitment Email in Appendix B). Student-athletes who expressed interest in participating in the study signed and submitted an electronic consent form and completed a participant intake form to gather demographic information prior to the first interview session (see Participant Consent Form in Appendix C).

Data Collection

Upon Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, participants in the study engaged in two video and audio recorded, structured, virtual interviews via WebEx for a duration of 60-90 minutes each over the course of a two-month period. Prior to the first meeting, participants were asked to complete participant intake and consent forms that described the purpose and structure of the study and asked for their permission to participate in the research (see Participant Intake Form in Appendix D). The participant intake form required participants to choose a pseudonym for the purpose of anonymity and confidentiality. Prior to beginning the first interview, I checked the demographic information shared on the participant intake form and confirmed it with all participants for accuracy. Additional questions that participants had about the study were also addressed prior to beginning the interview, and I requested permission for interviews to be audio and video recorded to review data for accuracy and understanding. I provided a detailed explanation that all data collected would be stored in a password protected file and information that was discussed may be used for the purpose of research. Lastly, I communicated that at any time participants could choose to stop the interview at any time without penalty.

Prior to beginning the second interview, participants were reminded of the purpose of the study. Furthermore, I requested permission for the interview to be audio and video recorded and reminded participants that data would be stored in a password protected file for the sake of confidentiality. At that time, participants were reminded of the pseudonym that they previously selected, and a statement was made indicating their ability to end the interview at any time without penalty.

Interview Protocol

The interview protocol for this study consisted of two sets of structured questions that were divided into four categories and 34 questions total. The data collection instrument was intentionally structured using open-ended questions to allow participants to share experiences specific to recruitment to better understand the phenomenon: college choice. The categories used in the first set of questions, predisposition and college choice, had foundational elements of Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) College Choice Model to better gauge whether student-athletes were influenced by conversations and people. Questions throughout the interview protocol targeted aspects of Perna's (2006) Proposed Model of College Choice by providing more insight into the characters that women student-athletes noted as important factors for college choice. Questions were also developed using characteristics of Magnusen et al.'s (2014) model and focused on recruitment, influential individuals, and interactions throughout the recruitment process leading up to college selection.

During the first interview session, participants answered 14 predetermined questions regarding their predisposition to attend college and college choice (see Interview Protocol 1 in Appendix E). More specifically, I inquired about conversations and events that were focused on college-going during their youth and individuals who facilitated conversations. Questions

centered on college choice were related to factors that were important to college selection, resources used during recruitment, and the method(s) used to determine salient factors during college choice. Additionally, questions were posed about college selection and the factors that were most important throughout the choice process.

Occasionally, probing questions were asked to allow for elaboration and clarification regarding responses. The intent behind asking probing questions was to allow participants' experiences to guide the conversation to understand how and why they made meaning of college choice during the recruitment process. I concluded the first interview session by inviting participants to revisit topics, clarify information, or comment about areas of college choice that were not previously addressed. Prior to ending the meeting, participants' contact information was verified so they could receive a $20 Amazon gift card for their participation in the study.

During the second interview session, I asked 20 questions about resources available to participants during their college search (see Interview Protocol 2 in Appendix F). Furthermore, I probed about experiences specific to athletic recruitment, individuals involved in the process, and resources that were available and used during their college search and recruitment. These questions were designed to align with Magnusen et al.'s (2014) Social Influence Model on College Choice. They were intended to help to better understand who and what served as resources to women student-athletes during recruitment as well as provide perspective to experiences with university and athletic administrators and coaches. Similar to the first interview session, there was a concluding question that invited participants to openly discuss and/or elaborate on information related to the study. Prior to ending the meeting, I explained procedural information that outlined next steps for transcribing data and requested that participants verify transcripts for accuracy.

Data Analysis

Upon the completion of data collection, all interviews were transcribed. After each interviews session, data were transcribed and emailed to participants in portable document format (PDF) to be reviewed for accuracy using transcript verification. Each of the study participants responded to transcript verification following both interview sessions, and 19 transcripts were confirmed as being accurate after initial transcription. One participant found errors in their transcripts so corrections were made, and the document was returned to her for verification. Once transcripts were verified and validated by respondents as being accurate to the best of their knowledge, data were coded to identify themes and categorized to identify similarities and differences in experiences between participants.

Data were analyzed using Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological method. Following interviews, transcripts were reviewed by research participants for accuracy, and significant statements were coded. After transcripts were verified by participants, data were bracketed by listing my positionality as a researcher as well as detailing my lived experiences and assumptions about college choice and recruitment (Moutstakas, 1994). Following the bracketing process, transcripts were read again and then grouped into clusters of meaning based on common phrases and words to develop themes (Creswell, 2013). Detailed descriptions were written to capture the essence of the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994), and themes and descriptions were sent to participants via email to validate the structural and textural descriptions of participants' experiences (Creswell, 2013). Two participants responded to the email and verified the accuracy of conclusions drawn. Respondent validation required participants to verify the accuracy of themes identified and conclusions that were drawn from comments made during interviews (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 2013). Factors and experiences

were evaluated by sport as well as domestic student-athletes who were from in-state and out-of-state, transfer student-athletes, and international student-athletes to determine patterns, trends, and themes in data.

Following respondent validation, data were reviewed by a peer debriefer to evaluate the evidence provided to substantiate conclusions. During this process, the peer debriefer asked probing questions about how conclusions were drawn and inquired about evidence that substantiated claims. Furthermore, they asked how themes emerged and current literature that was similar to or different from the findings of this study. The peer debriefer for this study was a colleague at a peer institution who has extensively researched student development and has expertise in qualitative research. Additionally, the peer debriefer did not have an affiliation with the institutions or student-athletes who were a part of this study. Moreover, they were not associated with intercollegiate athletics.

Researcher Assumptions and Positionality

As a former college student-athlete who was invited to try out for the team as a walk-on and non-scholarship player in my first year and current professional working in intercollegiate athletics, the lens through which I view student-athletes and college athletics has changed. As a prospective student-athlete, my basis for understanding recruitment was through my older brother who was a highly recruited prospective student-athlete who played football. I am a woman, athletic administrator, and educator, who over time has seen that gender equity and revenue often look distinctively different in theory versus practice, and there appear to be few institutions truly working to balance the scales.

Having greater knowledge of research about college choice, issues of college access, and a broader understanding of the recruitment process as a practitioner has altered my perspective

about recruitment and best practices. Being equipped with this information has resulted in formulating beliefs and assumptions about how to best assist student-athletes who are making decisions about pursuing higher education and determining institutional fit. It has also influenced the way that I work to lead coaches and staff as they navigate recruitment and matriculation of incoming student-athletes.

Understanding various facets of college and the student-athlete experience is critical to assessing institutional fit and realizing the impact that fit has on retention and persistence (Duniway, 2012; Magnusen et al., 2014; Mattern, 2010). To this point, from the perspective of an academic support professional, there appears to be a disconnect and misunderstanding in what student-athletes and their guardians value when searching for an institution of higher education. Although students may not be concerned with details about academics while being recruited (Huffman & Cooper, 2012; Magnusen et al., 2018), it is my assumption that recruitment is an operation designed to gain the attention of students from an athletic perspective and appease parents with academic support services and student-athlete development programming. Studies by Perna (2000) and Magnusen et al. (2014) found that familial support and mentors play integral roles in college decision-making, and my experiences as an academic support professional in athletics are consistent with the findings of the research.

Current research on intercollegiate athletics includes a noticeable focus on men's football and basketball, two sports that typically generate revenue for athletic departments through media partnerships, merchandise sales, and major gifts within larger conferences (Duniway, 2012). Some sports also garner recognition of universities' brands through promotion of athletes who play on teams who profit from athletic ticket sales (Huffman & Cooper, 2012). To this point, it is my assumption that institutions attempt to appeal to the likes of student-athletes from revenue

generating athletic teams and allocate additional resources that appeal to the best athletes while sometimes sacrificing the student component for student-athletes (Andrew et al., 2016; Branch, 2011).

I recognize my subjectivity personally and professionally, and I also acknowledge my position as a researcher as it pertains to phenomenology. As a researcher approaching this study from a phenomenological perspective, I assume that the lived experiences of participants in this study, regardless of sport type, will be rooted in their social identities, including their identities as women. And although other identities, such as student and athlete are present, I am cognizant of the fact that gender identity may be more salient in comparison because of privileges held by male counterparts. This aspect is also unique given the history of oppression of women in U.S. culture and sport (Belanger, 2016).

The professional experiences that I have prior to conducting research are valuable as they add context to matters regarding college choice of student-athletes, recruitment experiences, and student-athletes' perceptions of coaches' behaviors during the recruitment process. My experiences give me an opportunity to call into question what I think I know and believe in relation to the phenomena that may unfold when engaging with study participants. Acknowledging the value of rich professional experiences, I must also acknowledge the dangers of personal and researcher biases and flaws in research design present as a result of assumptions and prior experiences. Likewise, acknowledging my professional experiences also means being honest about the assumptions that I hold due to experiences and my beliefs in the value of social construction of information through interaction and contextual significance of individuals' experiences.

Trustworthiness

As previously acknowledged, qualitative research requires researchers to engage closely with participants. The purpose of close and prolonged interaction is to establish a rapport with participants in efforts to gain more knowledge and trust from individuals who can be helpful in better understanding the research problem. Developing close relationships, being flexible, and being an active part of the research are key components of qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). Although engaging closely with participants is critical, it can be difficult for the researcher to be objective; therefore, measures were taken to ensure trustworthiness with the research to keep researcher bias at a minimum (Merriam, 2009).

When entering the field, researchers determine what data are most important to research goals and sometimes narrow their focus to hone in on behaviors (Creswell, 2013). Two common ways to determine trustworthiness of qualitative research are transcript verification and respondent validation. Transcript verification allows participants to review transcriptions to ensure accuracy and correct errors, while respondent validation serves as a check for understanding between the researcher and research participants. The process involves follow-up in which study participants verify the accuracy of conclusions that are drawn and provide the researcher with clarification of any themes have been identified and misinterpreted according to participants. Following data collection, this exercise served as accountability and helped me remain honest when making meaning of experiences, beliefs, and perceptions of participants (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). It allowed me to move forward with research knowing that the conclusions that were drawn were credible and accurate accounts of participants' experiences.

In addition to respondent validation, researchers can use a peer debriefer. Peer debriefing is a strategy of quality assurance used in qualitative research in which a peer intentionally

questions and attempts to critically review data collection methods, data analysis, and key findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The purpose of this interrogation is to determine biases overlooked by the researcher and evaluate the implications for the research, given the chosen methods. A peer debriefer evaluates evidence provided and questions accuracy based on data collected and can be helpful in providing insight into data that can be used to conduct a negative case analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The individual who served as a peer debriefer for this study was a higher education professional at a peer institution who had researched student development and had expertise in qualitative research but did not have an association with intercollegiate athletics. Once transcriptions and coding were complete, transcripts were given to the peer debriefer to review, and we met to discuss coding methods and themes that had been identified (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As the peer debriefer, they asked questions about content that seemed biased, unclear, or inconsistent and requested evidence as justification of claims. Conclusions that appeared to be unsubstantiated were discussed, additional evidence was requested, and clarification was provided as to how results connected to the theoretical framework.

Delimitations

A delimitation of the proposed study is the narrow focus on student-athletes who are women and attend a singular mid-sized, Division I institution. Furthermore, selecting participants from two institutions limits the identification of other possible phenomena within college athletics and may make it less apparent if phenomena are unique to a specific institution, institution type, or sport (Maxwell, 2013). Also, due to the specificity in institutional type and lack of representation in types of sports teams, it is less likely that the research will be transferable to other institutions that differ in size and teams (Maxwell, 2013). Although

transferability is not necessarily the goal of this study, it important that other researchers and practitioners find data from this research to be a valuable contribution to higher education and athletics. Sampling strategies in this study reflect intentionality by using a smaller sample size for the purpose of having participants who can contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). In the subsequent chapters, I will discuss the research findings through participants' shared experiences and phenomena across the identified themes.

CHAPTER IV. FINDINGS

This chapter includes data collected for this phenomenological study designed to examine the recruitment experiences of women participating in intercollegiate athletics and understand the factors that are most influential to college choice. Data were collected using purposeful sampling of women college student-athletes and members of field hockey and volleyball teams in athletic departments that are sponsored by NCAA member institutions. Purposeful sampling was used because it required participant selection on the basis of experiences related to the phenomenon being researched and allowed for comparisons to be made using a smaller sample while maintaining credibility (Creswell, 2013; Palinkas et al., 2015). Additionally, women from field hockey and volleyball teams were sampled to gain insights into a broader range of lived experiences of women student-athletes from headcount and equivalency sports.

Much of the existing research has investigated the college choice of student-athletes from men's athletic teams, specifically those from high profile sports. Moreover, previous studies have not explored recruitment experiences of student-athletes to understand resources, support structures, and factors that are salient when making a college selection. Therefore, my research question was: *What is most salient to women student-athletes' college choice?* Interrelated questions integral to the research were: (1) Which individual(s) are essential resources to women during the recruitment process, and what specific role do they play in college selection? (2) Which institutional factors are most important to student-athletes in deciding which university to attend, and why? Study participants were asked to engage in two interview sessions to share their lived experiences related to college choice. The focal points of the interview protocol were predisposition to college, recruitment experiences, resources, and college choice. The survey tool was designed to underscore participants' explicit and implicit experiences related to recruitment

and college choice. A primary concern of the research instrument was to understand people, places, and things within participants' environments that were valuable resources and pinpoint institutional factors influencing choice to identify saliency related to college choice.

Participant profiles are detailed below using a table to protect anonymity, and the data in this chapter is grouped by respective athletic teams at each institution and categorized as domestic in-state, domestic out-of-state, transfer, and international student-athletes (see Participant Profiles in Table 1).

Candor University

Candor University is a large-sized, public residential, co-educational research institution located in the Midwest. The student population consists of about 25,000 students – 19,000 undergraduate and 6,000 graduate students. According to institutional research, 13% of the student population are racial minorities, 60% of students are women, and 1% of the population are international students. Candor University is an NCAA member institution that sponsors 15 athletic teams.

Field Hockey

The field hockey team at Candor University consists of 24 student-athletes who represent five countries across three continents. Five research participants from this study attended Candor University and played field hockey – two international student-athletes, three domestic in-state student-athletes, and one transfer student-athlete who are seniors, juniors, and a first-year student. Additionally, all participants from this team identified as White, middle-class women.

Volleyball

The volleyball team at Candor University had 19 student-athletes on the roster who represented three countries across three continents. There was one volleyball student-athlete

from Candor University who participated in the study. She was a domestic transfer student-athlete in her senior year who identified as a White, middle-class woman.

Victory State University

Victory State University is a large-sized coeducational institution located in the Midwest. The student population is approximately 21,600 students – 15,000 undergraduate, 6,000 graduate students, and 600 high school students respectively, with about 23% of the population identifying as racial minorities, 65% of the population identifying as women, and 1% of the student population who are international students. Victory State is also an NCAA member institution that sponsors 18 sports total.

Field Hockey

Victory State's field hockey team currently has 24 student-athletes on the roster who are from four different countries across three continents. Of the 10 participants in this study, three student-athletes were on the field hockey team – one individual was an international student-athlete and two student-athletes were from out-of-state. Additionally, one of the domestic out-of-state student-athletes also transferred to Victory State University after beginning her college field hockey career at a different university.

Volleyball

There were 15 student-athletes on the roster of the women's volleyball team at Victory State University, and all student-athletes were domestic students from the United States. Sarah Noble was the volleyball student-athlete from Victory State who participated in the study. She was an out-of-state student in her second year of college who identified as "middle-class."

Table 1

Participant Profiles

Participant	Institution	Age	Sport	Native Hometown Region	Student Status
Angela Smith	Candor University	22	Field Hockey	Midwest, United States	In-State
Anne Bates	Candor University	21	Volleyball	Midwest, United States	In-State, Transfer
Hunter Kelly	Candor University	21	Field Hockey	Midwest, United States	In-State
Jess Vernon	Candor University	18	Field Hockey	Midwest, United States	In-State
Katie Johnson	Candor University	22	Field Hockey	Western Europe	Out-of-State, International, Transfer
Laura Lou	Victory State University	21	Field Hockey	Southeast, United States	Out-of-State
Sam Cummings	Victory State University	19	Field Hockey	Northeast, United States	Out-of-State, Transfer
Sarah Noble	Victory State University	19	Volleyball	Midwest, United States	Out-of-State
Sarah Parker	Victory State University	23	Field Hockey	Africa	Out-of-State, International
Tink Bailey	Candor University	21	Field Hockey	Oceania	Out-of-State, International

Note. This table displays study participants' pseudonyms and demographic characteristics that were used to analyze data.

Results

In the pages that follow, I address the research questions, detailing the results of each sub question prior to elaborating on the results of the main research question.

Upon analysis, it made sense to answer the overall research question last to capture the essence of the results in totality.

RQ 2: Which Individuals Are Essential Resources to Women During the Recruitment Process, and What Role Do They Play in College Selection?

Based on interviews with 10 participants, the analysis of the data revealed that parents and coaches served as influential agents, supports, and resources to women student-athletes during the recruitment process. Participants' experiences with their parents were closely aligned with one another and many spoke of sacrifices made with time and money to attend tournaments as well as provide feedback and oversight with coach correspondence. Sam stated, "My parents supported me financially, every single thing I did. I never paid for a single flight or had to give gas money, nothing." She also said, "They would never do my homework for me. They will never type emails out for me, but they were always there to ask, 'Do you want me to proofread it before?'"

Participants also shared that parents challenged their thought processes by questioning decisions in supportive ways that subconsciously influenced student-athletes' desires. Parents were acknowledged as subconsciously influencing recruitment and college selection even though student-athletes were constantly reminded of their autonomy in making a college choice. When having conversations about college, Katie's family questioned her aspirations to leave home. She explained,

When I was 17, I made the decision that I was going to America. And then that's when my mom and dad would be like, 'Are you sure this is what you want to do?' But then they also made it very clear that if I did go out, I could always come back. It's not a permanent thing.

Hunter shared that she was doubtful that she would have made the correct decision in selecting a university had it not been for her parents probing questions. When asked to explain, she said,

I think, if they wouldn't have had those conversations and sitting down and saying, 'Is this somewhere that you want to go, somewhere that you would be happy spending the next four-ish of your life?' I would have probably picked something a lot quicker than I did and not had as much thought put into my choice. I think having those conversations and talking about things and talking things through definitely helped knock things off the list.

High school and club coaches lent their expertise about college teams' dynamics and coaching staffs. They also played a substantial role in recruitment. Participants spoke about their tendency to listen to high school and club team coaches since they knew college coaches and were critical to prospective student-athletes being promoted as valuable to worthy recruits. Hunter remarked, "My coach knew everybody. He made sure to know what everybody wanted and how he could help and how his repertoire of resources could be used." Sarah N. acknowledged the significance of her club volleyball coaches promoting her talent by saying,

A lot of college coaches will talk to your club coach, either right after games or call them. Your club coach can provide more information about you and who you are as a person and a player. If a college coach is talking to them about somebody, they can also throw your name in there. They can be like, 'But have you seen this, like this girl on my team?

She's a hard worker.' and will hype you up to them so they can become interested. They also organize the information that you're getting sent to you and keep passing it along. That's one of the big things that they've done for me is pass along with a ton of information that college coaches would give them or emails that they'd signed on. They also put your name in other college coaches' heads, and they become interested in watching you more.

Anne, a volleyball student-athlete who transferred institutions after her first year of college indicated that her coaches were helpful with promoting her talent but also shared dislike for coaches' allegiance and loyalty to their college coaching friends during the recruitment process. She indicated that she put a higher value on her coach's advice than her own desires, which led to deciding to attend an institution where the coaching staff and team was not supportive. She said,

> To be honest, I think the one thing that I do kick myself about in recruiting is, as much as I love my club director and she did so much for me getting recruited, I feel like her personal connection with the coach outweighed me. And that was when I was choosing between an ACC school and the first school I attended. And even though they still wore Russell apparel at the time, sometimes I still think like, 'What if I would have gone to an ACC school?' I love being at Candor and transferring was the best decision, but I always think about the high school recruitment. I feel like sometimes I trusted her more than what I wanted to do.

Furthermore, some participants stated the necessity and value of having coaches' guidance and support as they navigated recruitment. More specifically, Laura stated that she did not have the support of high school and club team coaches. Laura shared, "There was a time I

reached out asking for a coach's phone number who had told me to ask for it. And my high school coach said, 'I don't feel comfortable giving you that.' So that kind of topped off my whole experience was like, it was very much so on my own." Laura also noted,

> She kind of had her favorites who she was going to help and would do anything for. I wasn't someone that was disliked but I wasn't loved by any means. So, she would help those people out and reach out to coaches for them. But when it came to me, she made a comment at practice about how she talked to the coach for me, and it was 'All good things, of course', in a very sarcastic tone. She was not the one that was helpful at all.

The accounts that were highlighted illuminate the delicate nature of student-athletes' relationships with individuals that they identified as resources during the recruitment process. Also, these reports illuminate the respect for parents' and club team coaches' opinions as consideration are made about colleges.

Influential Agents

Influential agents are individuals who are in significant positions of power and/or control and can impact or change participants' thought processes directly or indirectly. Participants spoke about the effect of parents' and coaches' thoughts, feelings, and comments during recruitment and how it impacted their decision-making during the college choice process.

There Was Never a Point Where I Felt Like I Was Going Through it Alone

During interviews, 10 participants shared that their parents played a vital role in their decision-making process. In this theme, responses centered on conscious and subconscious parental influence during the college choice process. Participants shared that parents frequently assisted during the college choice process by prompting student-athletes to think about key

aspects of their college experience that were connected to, as well as independent of, their athletic experience. Sarah N. commented,

> They were making sure that I kept my options open and asking, 'Well, what if you get injured and then you can't play?' or 'What if you just lose the love of the game?', which some people do end up doing, and making sure that I was looking outside of volleyball and also at the university in general. So, I would say they definitely helped me a lot through it.

> Angela, who identified her family as middle-class, mentioned that affordability was a consistent part of the conversation when it came to the recruitment process so her parents, along with her coaches, frequently inquired about affordability and provided reminders about institutional characteristics that she should consider during her search. She noted,

> So my coaches, along with my parents, were like, 'Hey, you should be looking for this.' My parents were like, 'You should be looking for schools that you could potentially pay for.' And all of these different things that I never would have considered.

Moreover, since affordability was a critical element of college-going emphasized by Angela's parents, it became a focal point for her during her college search. Likewise, Sarah P. reported that what she wanted in a university stemmed from what her parents wanted for her. She emphasized,

> I think my parents and I had the same opinions about it. I think a lot of what I wanted stemmed from what they had expressed to me in terms of what kind of college I want to go to. They influenced that a lot.

In the case of several field hockey and volleyball student-athletes, parents regularly probed about the qualities that student-athletes desired in institutions and academic interests, encouraging them to think about university life beyond athletics. Hunter said,

> I think that they kind of helped me narrow down the places that I wanted to go based on the interest that I had, the things I was good at. And I was narrowed down to two schools at the very end. And they were very adamant about me going to the place, not just because I liked one coach over the other or I liked that one program over the other, but where did I see myself graduating? Where did I see myself thriving academically and like socially?

Hunter also emphasized that she may have chosen a different institution had it not been for her parents. She continued by saying,

> I don't think without them having those conversations, I probably wouldn't have picked the right place. And they were just very adamant about making sure I saw the full picture of what college was because of their experiences that they've had. Like all the opportunities I had in front of me.

Sarah N. indicated that her parents told her what she should be looking for during the recruitment process. She recalled,

> They kind of knew what he was going through, and everything. So, they helped me while people were talking to me, kind of saying like, 'This is important', or they would have questions. So, I feel like I couldn't really come up with a lot of questions when I was on my visits. I'm like, you tell me the information. And I'll take it in. And then they definitely had questions that I wouldn't have thought of while I was there that ended up being important.

Anne reported thinking that she was impressed by universities after each visit and thought that she would commit. Her parents influenced her recruitment process and college choice by having ongoing conversations about what she liked and disliked about each institution. Anne explained,

> My family helped the most, because they were super excited for all the good things, but still were able to like, keep me mature about it and make sure that I was making the right decisions instead of just, 'Oh, I want to go here because this one...' After every visit, not every single one, but there's like some visits where I'd be like, 'Oh, this is my school.' And then I go on another one. I'm like, 'Oh, this is my school.' So, just having them make me sit down and weigh the pros and cons of each school.

Participants also said that parents questioned aspects of student-athletes' thought processes in efforts to determine academic, athletic, financial, and social fit for their children. Angela, specifically noted being influenced by her mother because her mother knew her preferences and Angela cared a lot about what her parents thought. She said,

> My mom was pretty influential in the recruiting process and helping me, but sitting down with her and having a conversation of 'Hey, say you don't go to field hockey, are you still going to be happy with going to a university? Are you still going to want to go pursue higher education?' They knew what I liked, what would upset me, what they could see me doing, how they could see me fitting in. They knew me really, really well and knew my tendencies. So, I think it was I trusted them a lot and cared a lot about what they thought, even though they tried not to tell me too.

Angela, like Sam and Anne, recalled overlooking the value of the overall institution and educational aspects of college outside of athletics until her mother prompted her to think

broader than field hockey. Sam also noted that in the initial stages of her first college search, her parents urged her to consider academic rigor, location of institutions, and her desire to be near family when exploring college options. She recalled,

> They're like, we are not going to choose a school for you or influence you on what school to choose. They said, "Do you think this is a little bit too challenging?" or "Do you really want all that city? You might miss ma. It may make you miss home."

Participants also described college selection as being a choice independent of influence but communicated the invaluable role that their parents played in bringing up critical points that would not otherwise be considered. Sam shared,

> They would never say, 'You should go to the school over that school', or 'We want you to attend that school,' like never. One of their big things was they didn't want to have any influence in it, especially in my second process. I knew that they did not want me to go to a private school on the east coast, but they would never say it. I would ask them, 'What should I do?' They would not tell me. They were like, "This is your decision. It's not our decision."

Furthermore, field hockey and volleyball student-athletes at both institutions indicated often being reminded by parents that they would be supported regardless of their choice of college but being swayed by parents' comments, thoughts, and/or feelings. Anne stated,

> I think the biggest thing for me was having open discussions with my family. There was never a point where I felt like I was going through it alone. And they always told me, 'This is just our opinion. You can always do what you want to do. We're going to support you regardless.' But their opinions did weigh really heavily on me in making sure that they were happy with it as well. Me and my dad visited a school on the west coast once

and we came home and my mom was like, 'No. I understand if they offer you and you want to go there, okay. But just know, we will never be able to visit you versus someplace within driving range.' So, hearing that made me want to go away from home, but I still wanted to see my family, so I had to cut that one out after hearing their opinions on it.

International student-athletes explained that parental influence was critical due to affordability and comfortability with coaching staffs. Katie, an international student-athlete from Africa said,

When my parents found out, I was getting a really big scholarship for CU, they were over the moon because it was a huge financial help for them, especially being the oldest of four. They were like, it's a big weight off their shoulders. And I just was like, 'Well, I've got to do it now I can't get it anywhere else.' I was like, 'That's it!' and I'd seen their happy faces. I was like, 'Well, I'm going there then.' So that was the big push for me to accept Candor.

Tink was an international transfer student-athlete who aspired to attend college in the U.S. as a high school student but was unsure of how to bring her dreams to fruition. She began her first year of higher education in her home country and transferred to Candor University to play field hockey. She mentioned that her family did not have much of a say in her decision-making process, but they were involved during recruitment. Since she would be leaving her home country, her parents had a vested interest in knowing the coaches who would support her while she was away. Therefore, they were present on calls and inquired about prospective institutions and coaching staffs. She said,

My family wanted to, obviously, meet my future coaches. So any video calls and anything they wanted to get to know them and be able to ask your own personal questions so that they could decide whether they think it would be best suited for me in the sense of whether I would feel comfortable enough, and whether I was going to learn things from my coach. And then also, whether the university itself was going to be beneficial to my education.

Laura stated,

I think some of that was kind of influenced by my parents, because you don't think about not playing when you're younger. It's kind of like, 'Oh, this is going to last forever, I've been playing for so long. There's no end in sight.' So whenever I thought about that they're like, 'We just thought about playing in general.' They're like, 'Well, make sure you go somewhere that has a nice education,' and they brought that to reality for me because once you're here and blink, four years are gone. I would say my parents kind of had an influence in bringing that to reality for me.

While differences existed in the magnitude and nature of influence by parents during recruitment, international and domestic participants stated that their parents were helpful. Specifically, domestic participants credited parents with providing perspective to the process and challenging student-athletes to think beyond their self as an athlete preparing to enter college. International student-athletes indicated that their parents sat in on video calls and were not as explicit with comments about the recruitment process unless they were asked for consultation.

My Club Coach Had Very Strong Opinions About Where He Wanted Me to Go

The extent to which coaches influenced the college choice process varied. Some participants explained that their high school coach was very influential in a positive manner,

while most student-athletes acknowledged the significance of the coach of their club team.

Angela stated,

> My high school coaches went to Candor and my club coach knew the coach pretty well,
> since it was an in-state club and an in-state school. It was a big catalyst. It really helped
> speed things along. The coach at CU was able to come up to my high school and watch
> me play a high school game because he knew both of my coaches and both of my
> coaches vouched for me, then he came down and watched me play. So it was really
> influential with me in particular.

Katie, an international student-athlete, mentioned that she was influenced by her club

coach who was also her high school coach and coached the national team in her country.

She said that he wanted her to attend a school where she could play at a high level and

maintain her fitness to be able to return to play for the national team, and playing on the

national team aligned with Katie's athletic goals. Therefore, he helped her train to

prepare for her opportunity to play at a high level. When asked who was influential in her

recruitment process, Katie shared,

> My high school coach because he wanted it. He was part of the national system.
> He really wanted me to try and keep my fitness and playing up as much as
> possible in case I came back. So he was really pushing me to make sure I was
> going somewhere that fitness was a big deal. And I'd be playing enough.

> Student-athletes recounted conversations with coaches that provoked thoughts about

institutional characteristics and general factors that were imperative to making a sound college

decision. Angela remarked, "My coaches were pretty influential in telling me these things like,

'Hey, you should be looking for a school that is going to be able to give you some money, if they

have money, or a school that's going to have a team with nice girls and not just people who just care about the sport.'"

In addition to commenting on institutional factors that student-athletes should consider, club coaches had connections to college coaches and could advocate for members of their club teams to be recruited. Hunter, Laura, Sam, Sarah N., Tink, Angela, and Jess discussed the role of club coaches and directors' unique ability to leverage their networks against you or in your favor. Sam said,

> My club coach heavily influenced me. He would tell me exactly what school I
>
> should go to. And I mean, at the end of the day, I'd be like, 'I don't want to go to
>
> that school, I want to go to a different school,' and he would just have to be like,
>
> 'Okay,' but he influenced it definitely for sure in my first process. In my second
>
> process, my old high school coach obviously would never, she would never say,
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> 'Oh, I want you to go to Victory State because my daughter works there,' but she
>
> would definitely be on every phone call we have and point every wrong thing out
>
> about the other schools that I was looking at, and I knew that was subtly
>
> influencing me as well. I know, she didn't mean any harm, but technically, with
>
> that said, she influenced me. But it really was my decision but my coaches, my
>
> high school coach and my club coach, especially had an impact on it too.

Sam also communicated that club coaches influenced her recruitment process because she wanted to be mindful of his reputation and how it influenced his name on the club field hockey circuit. She commented,

> He probably wanted me to go to a school that would look good for him too. I
>
> mean, it's a give and take with club coach relationships because they're helping

you. You want to go somewhere that is good for you, but also, they want you to

go somewhere that looks good that they got you recruited to because it looks good

on the club. I knew that played a factor in it.

Similarly, Katie, an international student-athlete, discussed the coercive nature of her

experiences with club coaches. She shared an account when coaches provided an ultimatum that

demanded she choose between playing for the national team in her home country or playing

college field hockey in the United States. She noted,

I was part of the country's system by the internationals working your way up to

playing internationally with your hockey. And I was part of this camp where it

was in between playing nationally and internationally. And they sat us down and

we're all the same age groups so we're getting ready to go to university, and they

said, 'If any of you leave to go to America, you won't be able to play

internationally.' They said, 'That would mean you're done. We don't want you to

go,' and I just sat there and I was like, 'Well, I'm going.'

Although Sam and Katie's experiences highlighted negative aspects of coaches as

influencers, they also acknowledged the upsides of having connections to college coaches and

ways that can be beneficial to recruiting success. Angela, Anne, Hunter, and Jess expressed the

value of high school and/or club team coaches having familiarity with college coaching staffs

and endorsing their programs as being a good fit. Student-athletes echoed that having

reassurance from high school and club team coaches was a source of comfort in making their

decisions.

Angela shared,

> With Candor University, my high school coaches went there and my club coach knew the coach pretty well since it was a local club and a local school. It was a big catalyst. It really helped speed things along. The coach at CU was able to come up to my high school and watch me play a high school game because he knew my coaches and my coaches vouched for me, both my high school and my club coach, and then he came down and watched me play. So, it was really influential with CU in particular. With other schools, my high school coaches didn't really have much of a pull, it was more of my club coach. And like I said, he had all the connections with different coaches throughout the nation, so it was a lot of asking him, 'Would I be a good fit here?', or 'Would I play here?', type of thing. There were more connections with CU, which made me also feel a little bit better about going to CU, less nervous.

Hunter recalled that her club team coach served as an influencer during her recruitment. He regularly prompted her to communicate with coaches and provided direction on how and what to communicate. She explained,

> My coach would always check in and be like, 'Have you emailed? Do you know when you're going? What camps are you going to? Have you given them my email? Do they know that they can contact me, call me, ask any questions they want?' So he was just very available for me to come to and talk to, and he knew of my current coach beforehand, and so that's why he was so adamant about me going to talk to her. He just knew how important it was to me, but he knew he couldn't overstep and like he had a limit of what he could provide. But what he did have was like, super helpful, and I ran with that information that he had to give me.

Several participants discussed the necessity for a great advocate during the recruiting process. In the case of Jess and Laura, they acknowledged the critical role that club coaches play in promoting their athletes and stated that they did not have this type of support. The commonality between Jess and Laura was that their parents were both college student-athletes, however Jess had an extensive network in college field hockey because of family members who were involved in the sport and Laura did not.

Laura explained,

> I didn't get a lot of help from my college or high school coaches. So, my high school coach, anytime they always make this speech in preseason, 'If you want to play college, reach out, we'll help you.' Well, the time I reached out was asking for a coach's phone number who had told me to ask for it. And my coach said, 'I don't feel comfortable giving you that.' So that kind of topped off my whole experience was like, it was very much so on my own.

All participants acknowledged that high school and club team coaches can be influential in direct and indirect ways that help or hinder student-athletes' decision-making and autonomy when selecting a university to attend. However, it was more evident that international student-athletes did not have representation from club team coaches in the same ways as domestic student-athletes. Due to a lack of advocacy in this way, some international student-athletes sought out recruiting assistance from individuals who lived in their home countries but had connections to coaches in the U.S. These representatives appeared to direct international student-athletes towards institutions that they saw fit as opposed to developing a partnership during recruitment that supported forward movement and desires of international student-athletes.

Supports

Supports are individuals who provide assistance, reinforcement, and/or encouragement to student-athletes. This language and role is different from influential agents and is characterized by reinforcements with encouragement. Participants in this study identified family, namely parents, as primary supports during the recruitment process. The essence of this theme captured parents' willingness to assist student-athletes with recruitment through club team participation, preparing communication for interactions with coaches, and providing uplifting words throughout the recruitment process.

They Helped Me Write Every Email, They Drove Me to Every Tournament

In this cluster, individuals shared that family members, specifically parents, served as support mechanisms during the recruitment process. Participants spoke of parents being critical to their recruitment because of the financial means required to participate on a club team and the sacrifices made to travel to tournaments as well as attend campus recruiting visits. Anne, a volleyball student-athlete expressed gratitude for her parents being fully engaged in the recruitment process up until she verbally committed to attend the schools that she selected. She said, "My mom was with me at every single one of the camps. Even if she was in a cabin like 10 miles away having her vacation time, she was with me through all of them." Similarly, Sam acknowledged importance of her parents by stating,

> I had the best support system like in the world, like I'm so thankful and lucky. My parents were always like, 'Do whatever you want.' They supported me in every decision. They helped me write every email, they drove me to every tournament, they flew me to tournaments. I mean, I am so like, privileged, honestly, to have parents and family who support me in doing that and support me financially in doing it. I mean, they literally

helped me 24/7 with emails and phone calls. My resume, they never did anything for me,

and that's why that was big.

Sam noted that while her parents were supportive and helped, they were adamant about

her writing emails, resumes, and completing application on her own with the option for

their feedback.

Angela a field hockey student-athlete at Candor University also said,

My mom, and my parents would always help me out with the emails and how to send a

proper email. They would explain, how to not sound like I'm a 16-year-old and how to

say things well. They would tell me how to speak well to a coach to know the right things

to say. When we would go to a tournament and coaches came to watch me play, they

couldn't talk to me, so we would talk about how you can be polite without breaking rules,

or how you can stand out.

Sarah P., an international student-athlete who played field hockey at Victory State

University expressed a similar appreciation that was communicated by Sam, Laura, and Angela

for parents' assistance with preparation for correspondence with coaches. Sarah P shared,

I think support wise, my parents were very helpful. They were there every step of the

way, looking at the website with me and looking at what these two different universities

look like. They would sit in the other room while I was on the call with the coach just so

that they could hear what she was saying. And their confidence, I was comforted by

having someone that was from close to home, they were also comforted by, especially my

mother.

Laura conveyed similar thoughts. In explaining the integral role that her mother played as a

support during recruitment she said, "My mom would often help me draft up emails or point me

in a direction of where to go as best that she could." Gestures like this appeared to be meaningful to student-athletes during the recruitment process because they were unsure of expectations and wanted guidance about how to interact and communicate with coaches.

Hunter indicated that her parents were supportive because they found ways for her to participate in recruiting tournaments and maximize opportunities to visit college campuses since they drove instead of flew. In addition, she shared that her parents provided additional accountability and reinforcement to communicate with coaches and put her in position to capitalize on opportunities as opposed to completing tasks related to recruitment on her behalf. Hunter explained,

> Both my parents were super supportive. The moment that my younger sister and I started playing club sports, they were on us about sending emails. They made sure that we were going to see schools even if it wasn't an official tour, if it was on the way to a tournament, because we mostly drove since we couldn't really afford to fly. So if there was a school that we wanted to see, we would make sure that we stopped and did a walk-around and we saw the field, which was pretty cool.

Although many student-athletes described their experiences in similar ways, the nature of support provided by parents differed in some ways as expressed by Angela, a fourth-year student-athlete. Angela's experience with support from her parents also came in the form of encouragement at a point during the recruitment process when she lacked confidence and self-esteem. She recalled questioning her ability to play at a high level in college after inconsistent performances at high profile recruiting tournaments, and her mom provided perspective. Angela commented,

I had a really big rock in my experience because I just lost a lot of confidence and was like, 'I'm just not good enough to go. I just am not good enough to play.' And that's when me and my mom sat down and we were like, 'Okay, Angela. You are good enough to play. Your coaches tell you you're good enough.'

Data from this study show that the presence of parents as supports who aided prospective student-athletes during the recruitment process is not completely disconnected from being a resource. However, the ways that parental figures serve as resources is not directly connected to college selection as much as it is interrelated to student-athletes' predisposition to attend college and college search. This is evident in participants' accounts of parents' financial contributions during their college search and will be expounded upon in the supporting ideas in the next section.

Resources

In the context of this theme, resources were defined as individuals who have cultural capital and/or expertise about aspects of the college choice process and share knowledge or offer help to serve as assets to student-athletes. Participants described coaches as being valuable resources during the recruitment process. They noted that club team coaches as well as college coaches played integral roles in their recruitment. Club coaches provided a connection to college coaches and college coaches served as a bridge to the university.

They Offered a Lot of Information That I Didn't Even Think About Asking

In this theme, participants identified individuals who served as resources who were associated with universities as well as those who did not have institutional ties. College and club team coaches respectively were integral resources during the recruitment process for the majority of student-athletes participating in the research study. Nine out of 10 participants acknowledged

college coaches as valuable resources during recruitment due to institutional knowledge while six participants mentioned the significance of club team coaches due to their insider knowledge of how recruiting works and connections to college coaches. Sarah N. said, 'Coaches would take us around and show us all the resources. I talked to one of the head people in the business school and learned more information about what they had to offer."

Jess also commented on the usefulness of college coaches during the recruitment process; and in doing so, she referenced being able to meet prospective teammates as well as the connectivity to faculty on campus. When asked who was helpful to during her recruitment process, Jess noted,

> My current coach, definitely. Just her kindness and patience with me in making a decision and also helping me get introduced to the other teammates. She also told me the types of things I could get involved in on campus. I remember she helped me schedule a meeting with a professor who was the head of sociology or criminology, and that's something that I'm interested in. She was able to reach out to people in academics and help me get to know more about that as well as make connections, which I think was very helpful.

For international student-athletes like Tink, Katie, and Sarah P., college coaches were available to answer questions about the university and proactively relay information which was important since they did not have the means to take an in-person campus visit. Tink said, "My coach was extremely available. She was really good at sending me links and stuff for me to look into so I can get to know the university a bit better."

Katie also said,

The first time I spoke to quite a few coaches over Skype. And they weren't even ones I ended up considering going to uni for, but they still gave me a lot of information on how the recruiting process would be. Then I found out pretty quickly what type of things they were looking for, what they wanted to talk about.

In addition to college coaches providing education about their respective institutions, they shared details about life as an international student-athlete to alleviate uncertainties about school as well as training. Sarah P. expressed appreciation for the coach who recruited her to Victory State University saying, "She really gave me a lot of insight information as to what university in America is like and what I would be experiencing in a day-to-day student athlete's schedule."

Katie spoke about the recruitment process as an international prospective student-athlete and the ambiguity of how recruitment works. She also shared elements of uncertainty regarding the types of questions to ask or what to research about institutions since the university system in Western Europe was different. As a student-athlete who transferred due to the elimination of field hockey at her first institution, Katie expressed gratitude for the coach at the first institution that she attended because she was unfamiliar with the transfer process and unsure of her ability to secure a scholarship to continue playing given the delayed timing of her entry into the transfer portal and a bout with sickness that required her to return home. She explained,

> Before my second recruitment, I told my coach, 'I love it here, but I want to keep playing. I'm going to transfer.' She gave me a list straightaway of all the people who could still potentially be looking because it was quite late. They didn't say they were, canceling the program until halfway through the spring semester. So, we had half a semester to try and transfer. So, she gave me this list straight away, and it was actually thanks to all coaches being just so nice that landed me going to Candor. She got me in

contact with a school in the Chicago area, they were full for the year unfortunately. But she was like, 'My old assistant coach is now at CU. I think she is looking for people, I'll put you in contact with her.' So, it was thanks to them that really got me to CU, which I'm really still thankful for.

While college coaches served as invaluable resources to participants during the recruitment process, several participants said that club team coaches were resources as well. Participants discussed the power and influence available within their club team network and usefulness of club team coaches' social capital and advocacy on their behalf. Angela explained, "My club coach was huge, and he was a Division-I referee. He traveled in the fall, and he would ref these Division-I collegiate field hockey games, and he would talk to coaches. He knew a lot of people."

Sarah N. acknowledged her club coaches' significance prior to the formal recruitment beginning. They would prepare prospective student-athletes for coach interactions. She pointed out that,

> Most of my help for recruiting came from the club I was in during high school. During my 15/16 year, assistant coaches or the club director started talking us through what to look for in a coaching staff while they were recruiting you and what type of feeling you want to have.

Hunter expressed an appreciation for the reinforcement provided by her club team coach to prospective student-athletes in preparation for advocating for themselves prior to him advocating on their behalf. She said,

> We went to all of these recruiting tournaments, and he would get on everybody to make sure you're sending out emails. He said, 'People don't come to you. That's not how this

works. You have to be your own advocate when it comes to this,' and so he was really adamant about that.

Sam, a transfer student-athlete at Victory State University, shared similar sentiments about her club field hockey coach and being grateful for his endorsement of her and the way that he used his college coaching network to connect her to coaches. She stated,

> He pretty much talked to every single college coach that I was interested in and then would tell me every college coach was interested in me. I had a really strong connection between college coaches and myself because he has so much experience. I was fortunate to have a really experienced club coach.

Jess, a first-year student-athlete explained that she did not have a club coach to serve as a resource during the recruitment process but acknowledged that club coaches were helpful resources to individuals that she knew. In her case, she joined a club team at the end of her senior year of high school but did not solicit their help. She commented,

> I know that a lot of other athletes were part of field hockey clubs. Those coaches were very helpful in reaching out because they would attend events with them, and they gave them advice and helped them get recruited. I didn't really have that. I eventually joined a club team at the end of my senior year for a winter season, but I just didn't ask for their help. I guess by then, I already had an idea of where I was going to go. High school coaches and club coaches didn't really impact my recruitment process as much as my mom or the actual coaches at these colleges.

RQ 3: Which Institutional Factors Are Most Important to Student-Athletes in Deciding

Which University to Attend, and Why?

Participants described two key factors that were critical to finding the optimal institution and making a college choice. Two sub-themes, academics and team culture, emerged in the data that provided an explanation to this research question. Academics was highlighted in two ways. First, student-athletes presented academics from the perspective of the institution having preferred academic offerings and preparation, and then academics were also discussed in the context of athletics. More specifically, participants expressed a strong desire for coaches being respectful and supportive of academic pursuits in addition to athletic environments being equipped to provide academic support and guidance.

Important factors are defined as the elements that student-athletes identified as being major determinants to their college choice. In this theme, participants identified academics in addition to positive team culture as being fundamental aspects of institutions that were essential to their decision. Generally, student-athletes wanted to attend an institution that possessed the major that they desired and a healthy team environment.

Academics: I Just Needed to Make Sure That There's Something That I Could Do

Student-athletes consistently shared that they valued institutions that had major offerings that were of interest. Participants expressed not knowing much about institutions but having a general sense of their academic interests. Most commonly, participants who were unaware of their intended major were prompted by their parents to consider academic interests during the college search process. Some participants expressed concern about future career opportunities and being equipped with knowledge as well as skill sets to navigate life post-graduation. Anne expressed,

> The second time getting recruited 'go big or go home' was kind of like my family's motto, so we're either going to the biggest school that recruits me, or the biggest school closest to home. But then there was also the academic portion of it. Before I was like, 'I don't care, I can major in anything.' And now I was like, 'Okay, I need a school that has at least two majors that I really like, just in case one goes south.'

She also mentioned academic program rankings being critical to making a college choice and explained that she wanted to have choices in major offerings in the event that her first choice of major did not work. Similarly, Laura noted having aspirations of going to medical school and the importance of being supported by coaches to be successful academically as well as athletically. She said,

> The most important thing to me was being able to learn and study something that I was interested in while balancing the sport and not having a coach tell me that science isn't good for the sport and the commitment that you have.

Other participants explained that selecting a sound academic institution was a critical factor in their college choice because they wanted to have adequate career preparation and opportunities for employment upon graduation. Sarah N., a volleyball student-athlete from Victory State University explained,

> When I was younger, it was more like, 'Oh, I hope I can go somewhere that has a good football team or something,' and that just wasn't that important. Even though I love going to sporting events and supporting teams, going to a school that had a great football team just isn't that important. And I feel what was mostly important was that I'm going to the school that has a great business program, and it's going to set me up for some good opportunities after college.

Sarah, along with several other participants, shared similar experiences of researching

program rankings. Additionally, they inquired about opportunities for career development

within academic programs and across the institutions. As it pertained to athletics, it was

important to prospective student-athletes that athletic departments were well-resourced to

support their academic aspirations. Tink, an international transfer student-athlete shared,

> I think the most important part would be academics and making sure your universities
>
> have the academic potential and is going to benefit you when you're finished. Obviously
>
> going over there you want to get a good degree, as well as pursue your sport. You want to
>
> be going over there and have everything available to you, sport wise, and then academic
>
> wise the tutoring and stuff. You want to be treated, basically as what you call a student
>
> athlete. You're a student and an athlete and have both of those things provided to you at
>
> as high a potential as you can.

For these women, there was a realization that opportunities to make a living from playing

sport professionally was slim to none, and they needed to be prepared to enter the workforce

as well as prepared to compete athletically at their institutions. Jess, a field hockey student-

athlete at Candor University said,

> I knew that after college field hockey I'm not like going into the big leagues. And I
>
> wanted to have a job that I really will like. And so, I was definitely academically focused.
>
> I prioritized that over field hockey. And at Candor University they have an honors
>
> college, so I was like, 'That's a great opportunity for me to challenge myself in a big pool
>
> of students on campus,' and so that was a positive factor for Candor.

Team Culture: It Was the Coach, the Team, and Teammates for Me, Really

While some student-athletes' most salient factors were centered on the institution's ability to meet their academic needs, team culture proved to be a significant factor in student-athletes' college choice. In this cluster, participants described a strong desire to select an institution that had coaches who were welcoming and understanding as well as teammates who were supportive. Several participants noted that they wanted to be a part of a team environment that was competitive, yet caring. Specific to their teammates and coaches, they desired a family-like environment that was connected as opposed to conniving and negative. Moreover, they longed for coaches who displayed an interest in their well-being and their personal life beyond sport. Hunter, a field hockey student-athlete in her third year at Candor University said,

> I knew that I wanted a coach to be somebody on my side, somebody that knew personal details about me, somebody that cared about me as much as I cared about the sport and them. And I think that if I were to do that all over again, that would still probably be number one in the recruiting aspect of this whole thing. Because if you don't love the coach and the foundation that the team is built on and how everybody operates, it's just not going to be a great experience.

Sam, a student-athlete who transferred due to concerns about team culture also stated that being comfortable with the coach and having a positive team culture was critical to her college selection process. She decided to transfer schools because she felt as if she was a part of a poor team culture at the institution where she began her college career. She said,

> My most important thing was actually genuinely being comfortable and liking my time with the girls on the team and the coach. That was my number one priority because that was the biggest issue that I had at my first school. Almost my entire recruiting class at my

old school ended up leaving, quitting, or transferring because the atmosphere on the team was just toxic. So, I really wanted a secure environment and a family style team. And I really felt that when I went to visit Victory State, honestly, so that was my first important thing.

In addition to sharing that team culture was a key factor in their college choice, participants noted being attentive to student-athletes' and coaches' behaviors during the recruiting process as an indicator of team culture and values. They detailed accounts of watching the ways that teammates interacted with one another to determine if the team dynamic was competitive and encouraging or disparaging and subjugated by coaches and/or veteran teammates. Sarah N. said,

> I would say definitely the team and the coaches were up there 100% because you spend so much time with them and they kind of impact your day-to-day. Going to practice and knowing that I had coaches there who cared about me and always want you to improve and want you to have success was important. Seeing their coaching style, I knew that I didn't want to go somewhere that the coach was going to be yelling at us all the time, and then also the girls' connection. That was super important to me seeing that the team liked each other on and off the court.

In some cases, participants had prior experiences on high school and club teams with coaches and teammates that were undesirable, and that influenced their desire for healthy team dynamics. Jess, a first-year field hockey student-athlete at Candor University expressed,

> I just didn't want to have a crazy coach. And I wanted to have one that I could have some sort of relationship with. Didn't have to be much. Just something that was a little better than my high school experience. And so that was my goal at first.

Similarly, Laura, who attended Victory State, shared,

> Mostly the educational part, but also just seeing how the team interacts with each other. If she's having someone visit it's important and going somewhere where the place and the people that will value you and where the team will have a lot of chemistry so that you can have an enjoyable time is important.

Student-athletes also noted instances in which coaches excluded current student-athletes from being a part of their recruiting visits. In addition, Sam shared experiences about interactions with veteran teammates who received explicit instruction from coaches to act like family when recruits were visiting. Sam stated,

> I wasn't allowed to stay. I did a couple of recruiting visits at other schools where I slept over and had a lot of time with the girls on the team at my recruiting visit. At my old school, I saw girls for like 5 minutes at a time. That was it. I was not having conversations with them. I never sat down and asked them 100 questions. It was kind of evident that they didn't want that time between like the recruit and the student athlete.

Sam also remembers feeling defrauded by her coaches and team at the first institution that she attended as a first-year student-athlete. She described experiencing a shift in what she valued in an institution during her second college search due to experiencing an unsupportive and contentious team dynamic. She explained,

> I thought that I was going to be part of this team who was like a family who they were like, sisters, they loved each other. It was completely different. I mean, these girls were pitted against each other to compete for spotlight and compete for spots. There were a lot of mental games that they played on each other, from the head coach and the assistant coach. They're not going to say, 'Oh, we play mind games here,' but you know they

made it seem they had this huge presentation about how important the values of the team

and the culture and the climate of the team were, and it was a complete 360 when I got

there.

Sarah N. described being able to observe authenticity and a good team culture as a result of experiencing a toxic team culture on her club team. She said,

I feel like you can just start to figure out and see which ones are more real than the other

ones and which connection you can see more of. My last two years of club, my club team

kind of struggled with drama, and it wasn't fun to go to volleyball anymore. I just wanted

somewhere where it'd be refreshing, and that's where I wanted to be. Obviously, you're

not going to be excited to go to practice every day, but I was happy to be there. And I just

feel like when I went and walked on campus and the girls toured me around, I could

really see that they had a genuine connection within their team but also with their

coaches. The coaches genuinely cared about them as their players and as student-athletes

but also as individual people.

Participants were vocal about experiences during the recruitment process that were unfavorable

with prospective coaches. In instances when they were not introduced or given abbreviated time

with prospective teammates, they became skeptical of coaches' intentions and questioned

transparency. Participants were explicit about their desire to stay overnight on visits to be

submerged in the team culture, ask candid questions to current student-athletes and gain a deeper

understanding of who the people were that they would be spending the next several years with at

college. When they were not afforded opportunities to spend extended time on overnight stays,

asked to visit campus on multiple occasions, be invited into practice, or have unsupervised time

with prospective teammates it was unsettling. To be clear, these women wanted to initiate bonds

with their future teammates and coaches and be assured that the environment would be conducive to their mental, emotional, and physical well-being. The nature of support and culture was important since PSAs would spend more time with their team over the next several years than they would their families.

RQ 1: What is Most Salient to Women Student-Athletes' College Choice?

There were three themes that emerged in response to this research question that can be separated into two categories. The categories are labeled as "internal" or "external" to indicate their relation to athletics and the greater institution. Factors that are internal to the athletic program and/or universities are those that are supervised, operated, and/or governed by university policy (e.g., faculty/staff, majors of study, athletic staff, college teammates, etc.). Conversely, external factors are those unaffiliated with athletics or the institution.

External to Athletics and the Institution: I Think My Parents Were Very Much on Board with Me

This study, participants referenced dimensions of support and acknowledged people and items as resources when asked to identify individuals who served in that role during the college choice process. Based on participants' responses, support and trusted resources were frequently connected to individuals who were identified as being significant or influential in participants' lives during their college search and selection processes. When Anne was asked what she considered to be a valuable resource during the college search phase and why, she commented,

> I would say if you have a really good relationship with your family, I think they're your number one resource. Just having people that have your back as your resources is important because they're going to tell you the facts like you see it your first time getting recruited.

Anne also stated,

> My whole family was really supportive of it. My mom was my coach in volleyball from
> when I was seven until about 14/15. Club-wise, she stopped coaching, but then she was
> my high school assistant coach. So, she was always like, 'I never played volleyball in
> college, so I'd love to see you do it.' And then my dad was, again, the college athlete. So,
> he's like, 'Go to the biggest school.'

When asked about the role that family played in college choice, she identified family as a
mainstay throughout the process. She specified that they helped during her college search by
offering opinions and advice that eventually led to her selecting Candor University. Jess
explained,

> I feel like they knew what was best for me when I didn't quite know and that was helpful.
> And my family helped me to trust the process. They gave their opinions on each school,
> and they helped me realize the benefits. There's not many downsides for a lot of them,
> but we talked about what could be better at other schools and just weighing my options.

During the college search phase and recruitment process, Laura expressed that she had
dreams to play at the same institution as her mother. Laura's desire to attend the institution
where her mother competed was another meaningful display of the significance of familial
salience to women student-athletes during the college choice process. She noted,

> And then my main school that I probably looked at other than Victory State was my
> mom's alma mater. And one of the big influences was that it was home, and my mom
> went and played there. So of course, I wanted to follow in her footsteps. That was
> probably my first big one and the one that I was excited about, but I'm kind of glad that it
> didn't work out and that I found a way somewhere else.

Laura elaborated by saying,

> I kind of put all my eggs in one basket with my mom's old school, and that was where I wanted to go because my mom went there. Victory State had come to a few of our games to recruit, and one of my head coaches actually said, 'If you're interested there, I could speak to someone for you.' At the time, Victory State wasn't ranked very high, and I was like, 'I feel like I can go a lot higher than Victory State.' So I didn't really pay as much attention through that, and then when I met with my mom's alma mater, the head coach there told me that she was recruiting me in honor of my mom who played there and that she didn't know if I could ever play. And I felt like that was kind of a slap in the face because knowing some of the other girls that went there, I felt like I had just as much skill as. And she told me 'If I wanted to look somewhere to make an impact, look at Victory State.'

Generally, student-athletes named family and sometimes coaches, when speaking about their support system. However, there appeared to be a different level of emphasis placed on parental involvement between international student-athletes and domestic student-athletes. Families of domestic student-athletes appeared to be more vocal with their opinions during the college search phase in a way that impacted student-athletes; whereas, parents of international student-athletes were not as educated about the process to ask questions. When Katie, an international student-athlete who played field, was asked about her family's role in her college decision, she explained, "My mom and dad honestly didn't really know much about my American uni so they couldn't have many opinions. I think they just wanted to make sure I was happy with my choice."

Tink stated that her family supported her decision to leave her home country and inquired about what was needed to help her achieve her goal of playing field hockey in the U.S. She recalled,

> I kind of decided last minute after my first year of university that I should have gone overseas. I wanted to push the field hockey side and with my degree. My parents were super supportive, and all my friends as well, to be honest. Basically, my parents just turned around and said, 'What do you need us to do?'

Because Tink's family was supportive, and she would be attending school a considerable distance from home, she desired accessibility to transportation in the event that she needed to leave campus urgently. She added, "I became more attached to the location. And a sense just because I wanted to be close to my family." She clarified,

> Basically, I wanted to make sure I could travel home if anything happened or if I got homesick. Making sure that my family can come to me again, watch hockey or just come in and spend time together was important. My family only has my sister, my mother, my dad in the area that I live. The rest of my family is quite far away, so I was very close to them and have been my whole life. So basically, I haven't really been separated from my family. I just really wanted to have them nearby if I needed them or just you know, so I can stay in touch.

Emphasis on having a connection to home was also reiterated by Sarah P. when she discussed what stood out to her about the school that she selected. She indicated,

> Every team that I've been on has been like a family environment. I mean, my dad was my coach, so I was looking for the same sort of feeling to make me feel comfortable.

Because I'm coming halfway across the world to a culture I don't understand or don't

know anything about really.

As it pertains to making a college choice, Anne referenced wanting to attend a school on

the west coast, away from her family in the Midwest. She was deterred from selecting that

institution due to sentiments from her family about the inability to travel to watch competitions

consistently. Moreover, she explicitly stated that family played an integral role in her college

choice. She remarked,

Family was the biggest part again, making sure that I was closest to home. My dad is the

one that did all the dirt work on figuring out that the Southeastern Conference school and

Mid-American Conference school both had brand new coaching styles, and he's like,

'You know what that feels like to be at the beginning of a program. Do you want to do

that again for your last two years of college too?'

Internal to Athletics and the Institution: I Really Wanted a Sense of Community on My

Team

Another theme that emerged was related to student-athletes having a sense of belonging

and community. Participants referenced a desire to have a sense of community within the habitus

of the town where institutions were located, on campus, or within their athletic setting. Anne

declared,

I think that if you're not happy somewhere, you can't be successful in any part of what

you're doing in school life and athletic life. So, making sure that you have a good team

with a family type feel as your home away from home is a big part of it.

Sam, another transfer student-athlete, expressed similar feelings to Anne. She indicated

that having a sense of community among her future teammates was important in light of

having an unsupportive team environment at her previous school. She remarked, "I really wanted a sense of community on my team during my second recruiting process. They are definitely the reason that I chose my second school."

From Katie's perspective as an international student-athlete, she communicated that having a tight community was important since her high school environment was small. Also, given that she had never been to the U.S., it was critical that she could connect with individuals and transition well. Katie commented,

> I guess with the first quality, was definitely the close-knit community. I'd come from a school where it wasn't that big, so I wasn't used to being in such a big environment. And having never traveled alone before or even gone to America, it sounded like quite an easy transition at the end of the day. So that was quite nice.

Katie, like other participants, indicated that there were parallels between aspects of universities that were important to her and her parents. When probed about similarities between what Katie's parents wanted in a university and what she desired, she stated,

> I definitely think that was important to me as well, just because I never traveled on my own, so I really wanted to make sure I had at least some sort of support system going out there. So for instance, other teammates reaching out to me before I left was a big help. Because I felt like I knew some people at some level, at least, before leaving. Also, my parents weren't as bothered about this, but the level I could have played at would have been a big factor for me. But like, my parents are just more focused on the supportive and safety side.

Katie also recalled feeling like the coaches were intentional during the recruitment process and that contributed to her feeling of connectedness to the team community. She

explained that she felt wanted by the coaches and welcome when the coaching staff put her in

touch with another international student-athlete to ask questions about the team and life as an

international student at their institution. She explained,

> I liked how they seemed very intent on recruiting me. It felt like they really wanted me
>
> as a player, which I really liked because sometimes they just wanted to see how you're
>
> doing. With them it was like they really wanted me, and I liked how straight away I was
>
> in contact with the other international girl. They were like, 'She's more than happy to
>
> talk to you. We've already asked her. We would love to have you here.' And I just felt I
>
> just got very involved with the community quite quickly, which just really drew me in.

Furthermore, Katie stated that community would still be critical to her choice since she

would not be able to visit home like domestic students. She shared, "I still think safety is

a huge thing and feeling as if you're part of a community is another thing I would add,

especially with how isolating it can be not being able to go home, like all the other

students can."

When Laura was asked what stood out about the university that she selected the most, she

specified community. During Laura's recruitment, she recalled an instance when a current

college student held a door even though it was cold and feeling connected to Victory State at that

moment. She said,

> I definitely liked that community feel. When I toured the campus, everyone was so nice.
>
> It was a really cold day, I remember, but I mean, there were people holding the doors for
>
> you, and I just liked it. It was just a tight, tight feel. It felt comfortable, and I left and I
>
> was like, 'I feel like this is like a place for me.' And then still being able to study what I

wanted, and I felt like I was excited about the coach and the team. I just liked being there, it just felt right. And everyone was very welcoming.

Sarah N. discussed yearning for an institution where student life mattered in addition to having cohesion among her team and the greater athletic community. She outlined that athletes from various teams supporting one another was important to her feeling supported and connected as a volleyball student-athlete. She commented,

What was also important to me was the athletic department and the other student athletes. I thought it was really cool that, here, all the student athletes go to each other's games and support each other, and we love going to other people's games and knowing that you have that support system of not just your team but everybody else is also watching and supporting. So that was one thing that I thought was really cool here at Victory State.

Sarah P. shared similar desires. She acknowledged that college can be intimidating but shared that she wanted teammates who felt like family because she would be spending an ample amount of time in their presence. Sarah also said that having a community of support was valuable to her since she was an international student-athlete who did not have family close. She noted,

This sounds so cheesy, and I'm well aware of that, but I definitely wanted the family feel. College is scary, no matter what because you don't know what type of people are there. You're going to make friends but going on to a team where you know that you have 20 plus teammates who ultimately are your friends at the end of the day, is comforting. I think for me that was the most important thing was having a team that could develop into people you spend your whole life with, so that was definitely the most important for

me...the family feeling and knowing that I have a support system outside of my family who was half the world away.

Angela, a field hockey student-athlete in her fourth year at Candor, did not acknowledge having a sense of belonging as being important to her college selection. However, she commented on the usefulness of the support in the community that she has established in the areas surrounding her institution when asked if she would select her current institution again. She said,

> After being here and being in this town, I love the community. I love the area. I love the community that I've built. Yes, CU is not the best school in the conference in field hockey, and it's not the best school in the nation in field hockey. It's not even close to one at the top but being a part of Candor just means something. I feel like I used to think about the what-ifs sometimes, but it never really would cross my mind because I was so happy here. Yeah, I think I would choose this school again if presented with the same things I was presented with back when I was a junior. I think I would still choose CU.

Angela elaborated by saying,

> A lot of it is like just the community here of CU. So, the community, not the county. I like the county but not all parts of it. I like the non-judgmental, the openness, the acceptance of the CU community and CU as a school itself. I like that uptown is right near the campus, and we've got the LGBTQ center uptown. We've got a church uptown that I go to that I love. I just love that there's coffee shops within a five-minute walking distance. I guess it's just more of a community. And ever since I've been here everybody has just always been so nice and caring. And my sister goes to a bigger school nearby, and whenever she would come, she commented on how nice the people were here- feel

like personally, if someone holds the door open for you at her school, that's big news, but like it shouldn't be. Here it's like everyone will hold the door open for you.

Internal to Athletics and Institution: I Did Not Want to Be an Athlete First and Then a Student. I Wanted to Be a Student Athlete

The essence of this theme emerged from participants' connection to being a student as well as an athlete. In this theme student-athletes expressed a preference to be challenged academically. Hunter and Angela described that they were undecided on a major during her college search, so attending an institution that would provide academic options as well as challenge was important. Hunter said,

> I definitely wanted something that would give me the ability to look at a wide range of careers, and it was really important to me that I didn't have to declare something super quickly because I wasn't sure what I was doing. I was at the beginning looking into what it would be like to be in the medical field. So, I looked into that and that CU has a really good program here. I didn't have the world's best ACT score, but I wanted something that once I got in, I wasn't going to fly by the seat of my pants trying to make it through but also something that I wasn't capable of slacking off. I wanted to be challenged, and I wanted to have that experience, but I also knew that it was partially how much I put into this experience is how much I'm going to get out of it.

Angela detailed that she wanted time to figure out a major; therefore, she desired a school with several options. She said, "I wanted options of majors and minors and different certificates and stuff that you can get, more of the degrees that you can graduate with. I would say those three are probably the biggest thing."

Anne said that she did not take selecting a major as seriously during her first recruitment, so she had to consider academic options during the second recruitment process due to academic requirements by the NCAA. Therefore, she was more attentive to the number of majors offered and the career options that were available to her as a result of her major selection. She emphasized,

> There was also the academic portion of it. Before I was like, 'I don't care, I can major in anything.' And now I was like, 'Okay, I need a school that has at least two majors that I really like, just in case one goes south.' So it was a little bit more education based the second time.

Sam, who was also a transfer student-athlete, mentioned that during her first recruitment process, she desired a school that was going to provide a challenge. She recalled, "I wanted to challenge myself academically. I didn't want to go to a school where it would be really easy for me because I did get good grades in high school, and I didn't want to go to a safety school academics wise." After prioritizing field hockey and the social scene at her first institution, Sam realized that having a healthy team dynamic and investing in academics mattered the most during her second recruitment. She did not feel supported as a student or athlete at her first school, which led to her transferring. When asked if the factors that were most important to her in choosing a college ever changed during recruitment, Sam said,

> Yes. When I realized I have to pick a major and I have to decide what I want to do with my life. When I was 16 I didn't even know what I wanted to do. Then, it started altering. I decided on psych but I didn't really want to do psych. Now I actually am psych, but that wasn't my intended major. I'm going to grad school. When I was choosing, I had to look at schools that had a psychology program because I knew I didn't want to do business or

economics. I had to find a school that had a psychology program, which most schools did, but that was one thing that altered my search.

After reflecting on her second recruitment, Sam stated,

My second important thing was my major so I wanted there to be a psych program and a nursing program. I didn't realize how important that was in my first recruiting process because I was 16 and said, 'I'll figure it out when I get there,' not realizing that some schools don't even have certain majors. They don't even offer some majors, so having that psych program and the nursing program for me to choose from was extremely important.

Sarah N. communicated that academics were always important to her in high school and that emphasis transferred over to what she believed to be important factors in selecting a university. She concluded,

All throughout high school, academics were really important to me. I was just the person who would stress out if I wasn't doing well. That was really important to me. Making sure that it was somewhere that had a good business program was something that I wanted because I did like academics, and I did like doing well academically.

Tink shared that academics were the first factor that she evaluated at schools during the college search phase. More specifically, she assessed their rankings in comparison to other institutions to determine their value. She noted,

The first thing I looked at was whether they had my degree. Psychology, I needed to make sure I was going to a university that had that available for starters. Then, to a point, I guess you could say the level that they were at with that degree mattered; whether they were the best in the country, that played a key role for me just making sure that I was going to get a good education. From there, I wanted to make sure that I get the best

degree possible in my field so I can get the opportunities and the money that I'm looking to get for my future.

Jess, a student-athlete with high academic expectations, initially sought to attend an institution on the east coast that was academically rigorous because she aspired to pursue a career in government. When her family experienced financial hardship during COVID-19, her goal of attending a small, liberal arts school on the east coast was not realistic but maintaining high academic standards remained important in her college search. She also acknowledged the low likelihood of playing field hockey as a sustainable profession past college. She stated,

> CU probably is more affordable and closer to home. I knew that after college field hockey I'm not like going into the big leagues, and I want to have a job that I will really like, so I was definitely academically focused. I prioritized that over field hockey, and at Candor University, they have an honors college, so I was like, 'That's a great opportunity for me to challenge myself in a big pool of students on campus,' and so that was a positive factor for CU.

Laura was also an academically ambitious student who had plans to pursue a challenging major. She specified that she wanted to have a balance between school and sport that allowed her to excel in both areas. She recalled hearing stories from teammates on her club team about coaches deterring student-athletes from choosing more rigorous majors due to fears of athletics suffering at the expense of academics. She remarked,

> The most important thing to me was being able to learn and study something that I was interested in while balancing the sport and not having a coach tell me that science isn't good for the sport and the commitment that you have. I wanted someone who would support that decision, so it wasn't necessarily all about the glitz and the glamour for me. It

was more 'I'm going here. I'm a student athlete.' The sport is obviously a big

commitment, but also being able to learn what I wanted was important because in the end

I'm not going to have the sport.

Laura said that her understanding of the importance of academics in the pursuit of being a

student-athlete was influenced by her parents. She added,

You don't think about not playing when you're younger. It's kind of like, 'Oh, this is

going to last forever. I've been playing for so long. There's no end in sight.' We never

thought about that. We just thought about playing in general. My parents were like,

'Well, make sure you go somewhere that has a nice education' and they kind of brought

that to reality for me.

Unlike Jess and Laura, Katie, expressed a desire to play on a team where academics

mattered, however, in a way much different from what other participants explained. Katie

wanted to be a part of a team where there was not much pressure to succeed academically since

she was not high-achieving. However, she wanted to do well and be well-positioned for career

opportunities after her tenure at Candor University. She pointed out,

I know I said academics didn't matter as much to me, but if they put too much pressure on

academics I think that would have turned me away a bit because I am not the most

naturally academic person. I work hard. I work really hard, but I don't naturally easily get

it. So, if they were a school where they expect everyone to be on the top of their game the

whole time even with missing so many classes I just don't think I could have kept up with

that happily.

Participants expressed a desire have balance between their identities as students and

athletes as opposed to being required to compartmentalize and prioritize one identity over the

other. For students who were academically high-achieving, they wanted to be encouraged to accomplish their academic goals without being discouraged if their major was more challenging or conflicted with athletic obligations. Conversely, student-athletes who were not interested in pursuing rigorous academic programs or had modest academic goals wanted to be met where they were and not forced to succeed beyond their capacity academically. The shared experiences of participants display their desire to be challenged and supported as students and athletes.

CHAPTER V. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the recruitment experiences of women participating in intercollegiate athletics. In addition to examining the recruitment experiences of women student-athletes, the basis of this research was to explore the factors that are most influential to women student-athletes' college choice. The main research question was: *What is most salient to women student-athletes' college choice?* Corollary questions pertinent to the research were: (1) Which individual(s) are essential resources to women during the recruitment process, and what specific role do they play in college selection? (2) Which institutional factors are most important to student-athletes in deciding which university to attend, and why?

Discussion of Significant Findings

In reviewing the research findings and better understanding women student-athletes' experiences with recruitment and college choice, there were several significant findings. First, women rely on their parents and coaches as essential resources during the recruitment process. Second, women student-athletes tend to view their roles of student and athlete as mutually inclusive of one another as opposed to dichotomizing their identities. Third, the factors that are salient to women student-athletes' college choice are both internal and external to athletics as well as the greater university.

Essential Resources to Women During the Recruitment Process

Chapter IV detailed that women student-athletes frequently consider parents and coaches to be essential resources above guidance counselors, peers, extended family, and siblings during the recruitment process. Prior research has pointed to parents as being integral in college recruitment and the general college choice process (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Magnusen et al.,

2014; Perna, 2000; Perna, 2006). In this study, parents and coaches were commonly mentioned as having influence on prospective student-athletes' college choice. Moreover, similar to previous research by Hossler and Stage (1992), Broekemier and Seshadri (2000), and Carter and Hart (2010) that provides context to college choice and student-athlete recruitment, parents are viewed by student-athletes as mentors, role models, and guides who serve as reinforcements throughout recruitment.

Comparatively, student-athletes identified parents as supports due to their ability to provide comfort and encouragement throughout the recruitment process. In this way, the college choice process is different in relation to Hossler and Gallagher's College Choice Model (1987), and the results from this study more accurately represent generational differences (Levine & Dean, 2012) and more current literature that identifies parents as mainstays throughout recruitment, leading up to decision-making (Houston, 2020; Workman, 2015). Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) framework claims that students begin to distance from parents as they move from the search phase to the choice phase, and the findings from this study prove otherwise by evidence of parents serving as influential agents and supports throughout the recruitment process and up to college selection.

Club team coaches were valued as resources because they had the ability to extend their college coaching network and share information regarding communicating with college coaches, questions to ask, and team details to pay attention to throughout recruitment. Club team coaches possessed the skill and influence to persuade college coaches to recruit PSAs from their clubs. In addition to club team coaches providing an endorsement of PSAs to college coaches, college coaches contributed positively to student-athletes recruitment by connecting PSAs to campus and supplying details about athletic programs. According to Magnusen et al's. (2014) Social

Influence Model on College Choice, the social and political skill of college coaches is appealing to student-athletes, which is in line with the findings from this study. However, Magnusen et al. (2014) also indicated that the political skill of coaches influences decision-making during the college choice process, and while that may be true in some regard, the results from this study suggest that women student-athletes valued the knowledge of college coaches as a resource-people.

Institutional Factors Important to Student-Athletes

The results of this study also show that women student-athletes valued factors that were applicable to the university and specific to athletics. More specifically, student-athletes communicated the importance of the academic offerings with college selection and also placed emphasis on team culture. There was value in truly being a student and athlete. Within the context of academics, participants specified that it was important for institutions to have their major of choice and/or a variety of options for academic offerings. Participants' preference for finding an institution that had appropriate academic offerings was rooted in the understanding that they loved athletics but opportunities to continue playing sport as professional athletes was limited. Therefore, institutions had to be equipped with academic resources within the greater university as well as within the athletic department so that student-athletes could be supported as a student as well as an athlete.

The ability for coaches to value and support participants in this study as students and athletes as opposed to creating a dichotomy between being students or athletes was critical to their college choice. Being affirmed by coaches that they did not have to choose between being competitive academically or athletically but knowing that they could prepare for life after athletics and pursue their passion of being a competitive Division I athlete was a point of

emphasis with the majority of participants. In a way, receiving support from coaches in this way was an indicator that coaches were invested in student-athletes' future personal and professional goals as much as current athletic goals. These findings indicate that women student-athletes take seriously the intersection of their identities as students and athletes with desires to be supported in both realms throughout college and aligns with prior research by Broekemier and Seshadri (2000). Moreover, the results from this study parallel earlier studies that discuss the importance of balancing student-athlete identity in order to sustain achievement motivations, both athletically and academically (Broekmeier & Seshadri, 2000; Love & Rufer, 2021).

In relation to institutional factors related to athletics, student-athletes desired a healthy team culture, one that could be competitive yet supportive. Throughout the recruitment process, prospective student-athletes longed to connect with prospective teammates and coaches to get acquainted prior to deciding. Participants shared that it was important to have coaches and teammates who cared about their well-being as people outside of their athletic identity since they would spend considerable amounts of time with their team. Also, student-athletes craved a family-like environment in the absence of their biological families and yearned for challenge, support, and reinforcements similar to what they experienced with their families at home. Although much of the current literature does not adequately represent experiences of women student-athletes, research generally indicates that student-athletes feel a greater sense of belonging from their sport as opposed to campus (Foster & Huml, 2017), which is consistent with the findings of this study.

Salience in Student-Athlete College Choice

The results of the study show that there were factors that were internal and external to institutions that were salient to college choice. Internal factors that were

salient included having a sense of belonging associated with athletic teams and the general athletic environment, as well as connectivity between life on campus and within athletics. Participants emphasized the value of coaches, teammates, and other staff in the athletic department who made them feel welcome within their community. In regards to the factor that was salient to women student-athletes' college choice that was external to the institution was parents and family.

Although familial support is not a factor that is directly connected to institutions, it is a factor that participants identified as salient to their college selection. According to Levine and Dean (2012), students today are more likely to involve their parents in decisions, in particular academic affairs; thereby foregoing the autonomy possessed by previous generations of college-aged students. The results from this research substantiate the recommendation to include parents in the recruitment process and is complemented by prior research that identifies parents as key influencers on college choice (Hossler et al., 1999; Levine and Dean, 2012; Lopez Turley et al., 2007; Magnusen et al., 2014).

Previous research by Gayles et al. (2018) explained student-athletes' sense of belonging is dictated by team and campus climates while research by Slaten et al. (2020) found that women student-athletes' sense of belonging was almost always connected to athletic experiences. Furthermore, current literature states that a sense of belonging with student-athletes is often improved when the climate within athletics and on campus positively aligns with the other in ways that boost student-athlete engagement across the institution (Gayles et al., 2018; Hoffman et al., 2002; Soria et al., 2012). These points bring into question whether the desire of participants in this study to attend an institution

that supported their academic and athletic interests corresponded with a want for belonging and community.

Theoretical Implications

The Social Influence Model on College Choice also provides perspective about who and/or what influences recruitment and college choice. However, the framework presents college choice as being influenced by academics, athletics, and factors external to the institution (Magnusen et al., 2014). This approach to college choice was critical to understanding which institutional factors were important to student-athletes' college choice.

While findings from this research indicate that athletic program factors are important to women student-athletes, they are important in different ways than described by Magnusen et al. (2014). The Social Influence Model on College Choice (Magnusen et al., 2014) suggests that there is an interplay between athletic program factors such as facilities and having an opportunity to play, academic factors related to major options and institutional reputation, and career opportunities post-graduation, as well as factors that are not in the institution's control like climate, location, and the economy that influence college choice.

Data from this study are congruent in some ways, but they also add more perspective by substantiating evidence that recruitment and college choice for women student-athletes is more equally balanced between athletic and academic factors than the external category. Magnusen et al.'s (2014) Social Influence Model on College Choice lists communication tactics used by recruiters to influence and connect with student-athletes during the recruitment process. In the case of field hockey and volleyball student-athletes in this study, they directly and indirectly identified communication strategies used by coaches during recruitment to appeal to their

interests. Within Magnusen et al.'s (2014) framework, recruiters appeal to student-athletes through rational persuasion by communicating programmatic and institutional successes, connect through inspirational appeal by sharing the vision and values of programs, use apprising by providing examples of ways coaches can enhance players' skills, apply pressure by placing deadlines on commitments, and use coalition by way of club team coaches. However, one strategy that The Social Influence Model on College Choice (Magnusen et al., 2014) does not identify is peer-to-peer engagement.

Throughout interviews, research participants expressed the value of getting to engage with prospective teammates and that being helpful to envisioning themselves as a future member of the teams and beginning to establish community. *How College Affects Students* (2016) and work by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) indicates that students learn best and are more likely to listen to their peers. Therefore, it is critical for recruits to connect with current members of the team during recruitment to provide insights about team culture and details about the institution. More importantly, the inclusion of peers within the communication and engagement dynamic during the recruitment process is a key aspect of this theoretical framework that should be adjusted. Currently, Magnusen et al.'s (2014) model primarily recognizes influential agents as coaches and parents. Also, consistently including current student-athletes as a part of the recruitment process warrants opportunities for additional touch points and people as a resource to assist in instances when coaches and/or influential agents cannot.

Data from this study mimic Perna's (2006) Proposed Model of College Choice by displaying how college choice is a result of context and individual circumstance. Resources such as social capital, access to tournaments to be recruited, and knowledge about the college-going process influence college choice. Furthermore, findings that indicated that parents serve as

influential agents during college selection reinforce the idea that the presence of parents and guardians can serve as a structural support or barrier to college selection.

Implications for Practice

According to the NCAA, a prospective student-athlete is a student who has begun the ninth grade and has not enrolled as a full-time student at a university (NCAA, Bylaw 13.02.12). Since the data from this study show that prospective student-athletes (PSAs) are minors who are influenced by parents' comments, opinions, and desires during the recruitment process, it is critical that coaches and administrators work to recruit parents just as much as they do PSAs.

The trust and mutual respect that exists between student-athletes and parents as well as high school or club team coaches remains a critical aspect of recruitment. The results from this study and the chosen theoretical frameworks provide perspective to the intersections of parental and coach involvement, privilege, and social and cultural capital connected to athletic recruitment for women in this study who played volleyball and field hockey. Moreover, the nature of support and level of privilege relate to people and artifacts that are essential resources to student-athletes when making a college choice (Carter-Francique et al., 2015). Engaging influential agents like parents as well as club team coaches during the recruitment process is critical to understanding prospective student-athletes' institutional wants and college coaches serve as valuable resources.

When considering resources, there is an undisputed element of privilege that is associated with recruiting prospective student-athletes. The resources span from having the financial means associated with the cost to participate in club sport (Feiner, 2015; Koba, 2014) to access to social networks to educate student-athletes about the recruitment process (Hextrum, 2018). Many of the participants in this study referenced that being members of club teams was invaluable to their

athletic recruitment because they received assistance being promoted to coaches. Endeavors such as club sports, especially for the sports researched in this study, require substantial financial resources to be a member of the club, fund equipment needs and fees, and travel to competitions (Feiner, 2015; Koba, 2014). The return on investment for families who can afford to participate in club sports grants opportunities to develop social capital.

Social capital increases social networks that include individuals who understand the college selection process, some of whom possess power to grant access to participation in intercollegiate athletics and higher education (Hextrum, 2018). For student-athletes who lack financial means, attend under-resourced high schools, are first-generation college students, come from single-parent homes, and/or are international students, the gap of inequities is even greater due to unfamiliarity with processes and a lack of readily available information about college (Iloh, 2018; Iloh, 2019). This was evident in the experiences of international student-athletes who could not afford to pay an agency to promote their talent, lacked clarity about U.S. universities and athletic recruitment, and could not afford to make a campus visit prior to making a college selection. Therefore, it is important for college coaches to be thorough and transparent with information shared during recruiting visits. Most important, it is crucial for college coaches to be mindful of their assumptions and biases about PSAs, develop an awareness of their role as educators of prospective student-athletes and their families, and be intentional about how they engage individuals throughout the recruitment process.

Structuring campus visits to include contacts with campus partners is an integral part of bridging the gap between the greater university and intercollegiate athletics. College coaches should be mindful of including campus partners to meet the needs and desires of prospective student-athletes who long for an interconnectedness between their academic and athletic

experiences in higher education. Having relationships with university faculty and staff who can educate student-athletes about university programs and the ways that athletic, academic, and social pursuits can complement one another is a necessary component of supporting women student-athletes during the recruitment process as well as effective resource management. Moreover, current literature has shown that this type of collaboration and engagement has proven to be successful in universities' retention efforts (Pulliam & Sasso, 2016).

Universities' financial commitment to recruit student-athletes and the financial investment associated with it comes at a high cost. According the *Cost of Recruiting an Undergraduate Student Report* (2020), the median number of full-time employees at large public institutions involved in recruiting undergraduate students is 10. Equally important to this data point is that 30% of public institutions experienced a decrease in budget of more than two percent between the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 academic years (Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2020). If data remain consistent with 80% retention rate for first-time full-time students at four-year institutions as reported by NCES (2020), institutions will lose approximately $2,000,000 due to attrition.

Considering that public institutions only allocate about four percent of their funds towards the recruitment of transfer students and budgets are continually decreasing, institutional fit for students during their first college selection has become a more urgent matter (Ruffalo Noel Levitz, 2020). For student-athletes, especially those from outside of the United States, this concern is magnified if they are seeking to transfer institutions and secure an athletic scholarship. Providing early connections with faculty and staff on campuses can assist student-athletes with developing a sense of belonging early in the recruitment process and better gauging institutional fit, leading to improved retention and reduced likelihood of financial losses by universities.

Supporting student-athletes at universities is a collective effort, and it is an effort that must be led by athletic department personnel. Developing a collaborative community of professionals within athletics and across the institution that is diverse is essential. Having campus partners who can assist during the recruitment process to provide a holistic view of the resources and opportunities available is important to balance and acknowledge the intersections of student-athletes' identities. Providing student-athletes with this information assists with setting the foundation for developing the total person and supporting student-athlete success. Lastly, having diverse individuals across institutions who can serve as touchpoints during recruitment will allow student-athletes to forge relationships with other people who can be useful reinforcements for student-athlete retention and belonging.

Limitations

This study was designed to study recruitment experiences of women who played one of three sports at three institutions. One limitation of the study is the number of institutions used to gather a sample and total number of participants. Although the study intended to sample women student-athletes at three institutions, two institutions were used in the study. Due to email addresses of student-athletes not being publicly available for the purpose of participant recruitment, the third institution was eliminated from the study. The institution that was eliminated from the study was located in the Midwest and in the same athletic conference as the other two schools in the study.

Choosing to remove an institution from the study also meant narrowing the number of prospective participants and possibly compromising diversity in race, class, language of origin, country of origin, perspectives, and experiences. All ten research participants identified as White and middle-class, and all participants played volleyball or field hockey. Based on the team

rosters displayed online, having basketball student-athletes participate in the study would have increased the likelihood of improving racial diversity and provided perspective as to similarities and differences in recruitment experiences and the college selection process. Limited representation makes it difficult to fully address gaps in understanding experiences across different sports, social identities, social classes, and genders.

One of the underrepresented groups that was represented but not in a large quantity was international student-athletes. The international perspective on recruitment and college choice was limited to the experiences of field hockey student-athletes in this study. International student-athletes who were listed on team rosters at the schools selected for this study were invited to be participants. However, many international student-athletes who opted into the study as participants indicated that there was uncertainty about whether they were qualified to participate due to their international background. Their other international teammates were apprehensive about participating due to unpredictability and unintended consequences of sharing experiences that may not be positive. Also, international student-athletes were apprehensive about the impacts on their student status. Concerns such as these could have been addressed by explicitly stating in the recruitment letter that international students are welcome and encouraged to participate in the study.

Moreover, the timing of participant recruitment may have impacted the total number of participants recruited for the study. The target number of participants for the study was 18, and the total number of participants was 10, with only two participants being volleyball student-athletes. The recruitment email was sent at the end of the academic term when final exams were occurring, which likely impacted responsiveness of prospective participants. Additionally, due to

COVID-19, many eligible participants were preparing to compete during a spring sports season, which was nontraditional for volleyball and field hockey.

Lastly, COVID-19 served as a limitation. Some student-athletes opted out of their athletic season and stopped out for the first semester of the academic year. Therefore, they were removed from online directories at institutions, and contact information was not available. Furthermore, interviews were conducted virtually at a point when students were experiencing fatigue from online classes and regular video calls.

Implications for Future Research

The results from the research provide valuable insight on recruitment and college choice for women and also sheds light on additional research needed to expound upon literature on college choice as it pertains to intercollegiate athletics. Future studies should focus on the following areas: (1) institutional fit for transfer student-athletes and comparisons of salient college choice factors between their recruitment processes, (2) international student-athlete recruitment and college choice, (3) the socioeconomic impacts on recruitment and college choice, and (4) comparisons of recruitment between Division I autonomy 5 and non-autonomy institutions as well as Division II and Division III schools.

Institutional Fit for Transfer Student-Athletes

Committing to attend a university is a significant moment for prospective student-athletes in the same way as deciding to transfer institutions. Kissinger and Miller (2009) posit that student-athletes face challenges associated with academic achievement, athletic identity, as well as mental and emotional stability. Transfer student-athletes in this study explained that they felt misguided and/or misperceived the expectations in comparison to the reality that they experienced once they enrolled at their first institution. Much of what participants who were

transfers shared was related to deception during recruitment which impacted their ability to be their best academically, athletically, and mentally. Due to this, participants in this study who were transfer student-athletes said that their college choice factors and priorities changed during their second recruitment. A comparison of salient college choice factors for transfer student-athletes between recruitment processes could be helpful to college coaches supporting transfer student-athletes as they matriculate into a new setting. Also, this research could be helpful to college athletics and higher educational professionals respectively at the onset of student-athletes' first recruitment to guide their understanding of how student-athletes make sense of institutional fit.

International Student-Athlete Recruitment and College Choice

As emphasized in this study, international student-athletes experience athletic recruitment differently. From the way that universities are structured and club sports function to the strategies used to connect with coaches and have campus visits, there is a gap in empirical research about the recruitment of international student-athletes and college choice. More specifically, there is a lack of understanding about who serves as resources to international student-athletes during recruitment, governmental and institutional policies and procedures that serve as barriers to becoming a college student-athlete in the United States, and the impact of familial support on international student-athletes' college choice. While the financial costs to recruit international student-athletes is greater, supporting international student-athletes' desires to be informed and connected throughout their athletic recruitment is not. Understanding differences experienced during college choice specific to the timing of the onset of recruitment and the factors that impact college selection are necessary to better support these students as they transition into and navigate through higher education.

Socioeconomic Impacts on Recruitment

Throughout this study, references have been made about participation in club sports and the cost associated with being recruited. Whether intended or unintended, there are negative effects associated with club sports being the main method of athletic recruitment for college coaches (Koba, 2014). The choice to primarily recruit from club teams reduces opportunities for PSAs who cannot afford to participate but play sports that rely heavily on club team participation for athletic recruitment. Higher education and college athletics could benefit from more research on recruiting practices of coaches and understanding who they recruit, where they recruit, why they recruit certain areas and/or teams as well as how they deem PSAs as deserving of an athletic scholarship. Being armed with this information will be of benefit in understanding the impacts of coaches' recruiting decisions.

Comparison of Recruitment and Enrollment Management Across Athletics

As mentioned in the literature review, the cost to recruit and retain students is expensive, and the availability of resources to recruit student-athletes varies greatly across NCAA member institutions. Having a basis of comparison between institutions will provide a more candid view of challenges faced in recruiting and retaining student-athletes. Moreover, findings from the research could be of benefit to under-resourced institutions in developing more creative recruiting strategies that speak to the wants of PSAs and their families while also being fiscally responsible.

<div align="center">

Conclusion

</div>

This phenomenological study was designed to better understand the recruitment experiences of women student-athletes and reduce the gap in understanding experiences related to college choice for student-athletes. More specifically, this study sought to understand who

served as resources to women during recruitment and identify what was most salient to college choice.

Based on the findings from this study, women student-athletes rely on family and coaches as resources during recruitment. Women student-athletes find support in individuals they trust and respect and value having competence and reassurance within their circle of support to guide them throughout the recruitment process. They also desire a college environment that will support their aspirations to balance their identities as a student and athlete respectively and team dynamics that foster a sense of community and belonging. And in selecting a university to attend, having the endorsement of their support system is critical.

As institutions of higher education work to effectively manage enrollment of students and athletic departments are continually faced with budgetary challenges, it is more crucial than ever for collaboration. Not only can this partnership lead to more efficient use of resources for financial stability of institutions, but it can work to benefit student-athlete development and success during college. Athletics staff should be intentional about providing PSAs with an undistorted view of institutions throughout recruitment. This can be done by establishing trusting relationships through transparent and difficult conversations as well as including parents in the recruitment process. Faculty and staff across institutions can assist during recruitment by offering to be resources to athletics staff. Although there may be challenges associated with this type of partnership for university personnel, it is an opportunity to better support student-athletes before and during their college journey.

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APPENDIX A. PARTICIPANT ELIGIBILITY EMAIL

Dear _____,

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study examining the experiences of women participating in intercollegiate athletics and the factors that are most influential to college choice.

I am emailing you to schedule a time to complete a 60-90 minute interview.
My availability is as follows:

[Insert dates/times]

Please let me know which days and times work best for your schedule.

I have included the link to the consent form for your review. Please read and sign the consent form prior to our first scheduled interview. Prior to beginning the first interview, we will review the consent form to address any questions or concerns that you may have.

If you are no longer interested in being a participant in this study, please let me know, and I will not contact you regarding this study.

I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,

Breanna C. Robinson
Ph.D. Candidate
Higher Education Administration Program
Bowling Green State University

APPENDIX B. PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Hello,

I am a Ph.D. candidate in the Higher Education Administration program at Bowling Green State University. I am contacting you because I am recruiting women student-athletes for my dissertation study, and I would like to speak with you about your recruitment experiences when you were a prospective student-athlete choosing a college. More specifically, I am interested in learning more about the nature of your recruitment experiences, who was impactful, and which institutional qualities were most important to you when making a choice.

The purpose of this study is to examine the recruitment experiences of women participating in intercollegiate athletics and the factors that are most influential to their college choice. As a researcher, I am interested in understanding the factors that influence women student-athletes' college choice to provide context to recruitment practices that will assist athletic departments and universities with effective practices.

Participants will be asked to engage in two interviews lasting approximately 60-90 minutes each (3 hours total). In addition to individual interviews, participants will be asked to comment on the transcripts and preliminary findings to verify the accuracy of data. The total time commitment for the study is approximately four hours, and all participants will be compensated for their participation with a $20 Amazon gift card.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me at bcrobin@bgsu.edu or 419-410-5777.

Should you have questions about this research study, please contact me. You may also contact my advisors, Dr. Christina Lunceford at cjlunce@bgsu.edu or Dr. Amanda Paule Koba at apaule@bgsu.edu or (419) 372-7229. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Bowling Green State University Office of Research Compliance at (419) 352-7716 or orc@bgsu.edu.

Thank you for considering participating in this study.

Sincerely,
Breanna C. Robinson
Ph.D. Candidate
Higher Education Administration Program
Bowling Green State University

APPENDIX C. PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: The Recruitment Experiences of Women Participating in Intercollegiate
Athletics and the Factors Influencing Their College Choice (IRB #___)

Primary Investigator: Breanna Robinson
                                Bowling Green State University

106 Oberlin Ct
Oxford, OH 45056
419-410-5777
bcrobin@bgsu.edu

Key Information
This study will examine the recruitment experiences of women participating in intercollegiate
athletics and the factors that are most influential to their college choice. As a participant in this
study, your experiences will add to existing research about student-athlete recruitment and
college choice. The interviews for this study will be 60-90 minutes in duration.

Introduction
My name is Breanna Robinson, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education
Administration program in the Department of Higher Education and Student Affairs at Bowling
Green State University. You are invited to participate in a study focused on recruitment
experiences of women student-athletes and factors that influence college choice. This study is
being conducted as research for my doctoral dissertation. Dr. Christina Lunceford is my advisor
and is supervising my study.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this phenomenological study is to examine the
recruitment experiences of Division I student-athletes who are women and the factors that are
most influential to their college choice. Understanding the factors that influence women student-
athletes' college choice will provide context to recruitment practices and assist athletic
departments and universities with effectively managing enrollment management resources.
Moreover, this study is intended to provide a basis for developing set of best practices for
recruitment that can be applicable in athletics, regardless of gender.

Procedures to be Followed
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in two voluntary semi-
structured interviews. Each interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes in duration and will
occur in person in my office or another convenient, agreed upon location. If social distancing and
shelter-in-place orders are in effect due to the coronavirus pandemic, interviews will be
conducted virtually using WebEx. All interviews will be video and audio recorded, transcribed,
and stored in a password protected file. By signing and submitting this consent form, you are
granting me permission to use transcripts from the interviews as data for this study.

Statement of Confidentiality
Information obtained during this study that can be used to identify you will remain confidential
and will only be disclosed with your permission or as required by law. To maintain

confidentiality, all recordings of interviews will be destroyed after they are transcribed and analyzed. Real names will never be used in the reporting of data and data analysis. All interview transcripts will be stored in a secure password protected file. All files associated with this study will be destroyed by January 1, 2030. Dr. Christina Lunceford and I will be the only researchers who have access to these files. Data used for publications or presentations will not contain any personally identifiable information to protect confidentiality of participants. You will be asked to choose a pseudonym (i.e., nickname) to be used when sharing research results.

Voluntary Participation

Your decision to participate in this study is voluntary. You may decide to withdraw as a research participant at any point during the process. Refusal to take part in or withdrawing from this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits you would receive otherwise.

Participant Eligibility

Research participants must meet all of the following criteria:
1. Be 18 years of age or older
2. Participate on a women's team
3. On a roster as a student-athlete of a sports team sponsored by the athletic department at an NCAA member institution
4. Willing to discuss athletic recruitment experiences and college choice
5. Have remaining athletic eligibility

Contact Information

If you have questions about this study at any point, please contact me at bcrobin@bgsu.edu or (419) 410-5777. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Christina Lunceford at cjlunce@bgsu.edu or (419) 372-7383. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the Office of Research Compliance at orc@bgsu.edu or (419) 372-7716.

If you meet the above selection criteria and are interested in participating in this study, please complete and return a signed participant consent form to me. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided and agree to participate in recorded interview sessions. Your signature also give permission for data collected to be published, and you will be provided with a copy of the consent form for your personal records.

Printed Name of Research Participant	Signature of Research Participant

Date

APPENDIX D. PARTICIPANT INTAKE FORM

Thank you for your interest in participating in my research study. Please fill out this brief questionnaire, which should take approximately 5 minutes. If you have any immediate questions or concerns, you can contact me via email at bcrobin@bgsu.edu.

Your Name:

Participant Pseudonym:
Please choose a fake/nickname that will be used to protect your identity throughout the research process and in any subsequent publications.

Participant Criteria:
I am seeking participants who meet the following criteria: On a roster for a sport sponsored by the athletic department at NCAA member institution, be at least 18 years of age or older, participate on a women's team, willing to discuss their athletic recruitment experiences and college choice, and have remaining athletic eligibility.

Do you meet all of these criteria? Yes or No

How often do you think about your recruitment experience?
Never
Almost never
Sometimes
Often
Very Often
All of the time

How often do you think about why you selected your institution of higher education?
Never
Almost never
Sometimes
Often
Very Often
All of the time

Have you ever transferred institutions?
Yes
No

The following questions are for demographic information purposes only. Participants can choose whether or not they want to answer them.
Where were you born? (city, state, country)
Where were you raised? (city, state, country)
What is your age? (month, year)
What year are you in school? (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior)

How many years of eligibility do you have remaining?
Is your current coach the coach who recruited you?
What is your sex? (male or female)
What is your gender?
What is your social class status? (upper class, middle class, impoverished)
What is your ability status? (disabled or able-bodied)
Are there other identities you want list?

Preferred Phone Number:
What is the best telephone number for me to reach you?

Preferred Email Address:
What is the best email address for me to reach you?

Please feel free to share this participant intake form with others who you think might interested in participating! Thank you.

Breanna C. Robinson
Doctoral Candidate
Higher Education Administration Program
Bowling Green State University

APPENDIX E. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL: SESSION #1

Welcome participants upon arrival
- Thank participants for willing to be interviewed and participate in the study
- Review the consent form
- Explain my role as the interviewer
- Note that participation is voluntary and that participants can decline to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty
- Remind participant that all interview materials (e.g., electronic video/audio footage, audio recorder, transcripts) will be kept in a secure location, that confidentiality is a priority, and that the pseudonym they chose (from the online participant intake form) will be used for transcription
- Explain that the interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes

When participant is ready to begin
- Reintroduce the Study
  - **Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this study is to examine the recruitment experiences of women participating in intercollegiate athletics and the factors that are most influential to arriving at a college choice. My research question is: *What is most salient to women student-athletes' college choice?*. Additional questions pertinent to the research are: (1) Which individual(s) are essential resources to women during the recruitment process, and what specific roles do they play in college selection? (2) Which institutional factors are most important to student-athletes in deciding which university to attend, and why? My approach to researching college choice aims to develop an understanding of the factors that influence women student-athletes' college choice in efforts to provide context and knowledge of recruitment practices intercollegiate athletics. Moreover, the research questions are intended to help provide perspective on explicit and implicit biases during recruiting and provide a basis by which a set of best practices for recruitment can be applicable across athletics, regardless of gender.

Interview
Background:
Can you tell me about yourself?

Predisposition:
1. Can you talk about the thoughts that you had about going to college when you were growing up?
2. How would you describe conversations about college during childhood?
   a. Who, specifically, spoke to you about attending college?
3. How old were you when you began thinking about going to college?
   a. What prompted your thoughts about college?
   b. Why do you believe this to be significant in your journey to college?
4. At what point did your desire to attend college become associated with sports?
   a. How did your support system feel about you wanting to attend college for athletics?

College Choice:
1. At the time that you started your college search, which factors were most important to you in deciding which university to attend? Why?
    a. Did factors that were important to you ever change?
2. How did you determine factors that were most important in choosing a college?
3. What would you consider to be valuable resources during your college search?
4. What specific qualities of this school stood out to you the most? Why?
5. What other schools were appealing to you? Why?
6. How did what you desired in a university compare to what your family wanted?
7. What role did your family play in your decision?
    a. Are there other people who were part of the decision-making process?
8. Which factors were most important to you when selecting a college? Why?
    a. In what order would you rank these factors from most to least important? Why did you choose this specific order?

Other:
1. Is there anything that you wanted to discuss today or something we should revisit before concluding our session?

Closing
- Invite participant to ask any follow up questions or express any concerns
- Encourage participants to contact me with any follow-up questions as they arise
- Reiterate terms of consent form and procedures for withdrawing from the study if so desired
- Explain that I will transcribe this interview and follow up by email during the stated time frame for transcript verification

Thank participant for their time and reiterate the value of their contribution.

APPENDIX F. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL: SESSION #2

Welcome participant and thank them for coming to the second interview
- Remind the participant that
  - All interview materials (e.g., electronic video/audio footage, audio recorder, transcripts) will be kept in a secure location
  - Confidentiality is a priority
  - The pseudonym they chose (from the participant intake form) will be used for transcription and the reporting of any findings from this research project
- Explain that the interview is expected to last approximately 60-90 minutes

Interview
Resources
1. What type of assistance related to attending college was available to you at your high school or in your community?
2. What resources outside of the university did you find to be the most valuable during your college search?
3. Who were the individuals at your current university who were helpful during the recruitment process?
   a. What did they do to contribute to a positive recruitment experience?
   b. How did this compare to your experiences visiting other schools?
   c. Were there resources outside of the university that were helpful during your college search?
      i. Who or what were they?
      ii. In what ways were they helpful?
4. Which aspects of the college choice process did you need the most help with?
5. Which university resources did you find to be the most helpful?
6. Who or what provided the most help with during your college search?
   a. At the university?
   b. Within your community?

Recruitment:
1. How much have you thought about your recruitment or college search since you chose your current institution? Why?
2. How old were you when you first began being recruited?
   a. Can you describe your thoughts and feelings about being recruited when the process began?
3. Can you tell me about how your recruitment occurred and any experiences relating to the recruitment process?
4. What were your expectations of the student-athlete experience?
5. Who was influential in your life when your athletic recruitment began?
   a. Did any of the people that you identified as being influential in your life when recruitment began directly impact your athletic recruitment? If yes, how?
   b. Was their impact consistent throughout the duration of the recruitment process?
6. Can you tell me about your experience with college visits?

a. How many college visits did you take before you selected your current school?

b. What did you like about your current school more than other schools?

7. If you had to choose five people who were the most influential during your recruitment process and making a college choice, who would you list? Why?

a. Did those factors remain consistent throughout recruitment?

b. Which of the factors that you listed as important do you believe would remain most important if you got to experience the recruitment process again? Why?

8. Which components of athletic programs were most important when considering colleges? Why?

9. Can you talk about your experiences with coaches during recruitment?

10. How would you describe your experiences and interactions with members of the athletic department outside of the coaching staff during recruitment?

11. Having experienced some college, which factors that were the most important when you were recruited do you think would be important to you today if you were being recruited again? Why?

12. What is one word that you would use to describe your recruitment experience? Why?

13. If you had the opportunity to be recruited again, would you select the same institution? Why?

Other:

1. Is there anything that you wanted to discuss today or something we should revisit before concluding our session?

Closing
- Invite participant to ask follow up questions or express concerns and encourage them to email me if they have questions following the session
- Thank participant for sharing their time and perspective
- Communicate timeline with participants and information regarding what I will do with the data
- Encourage participants to contact me with any follow-up questions as they arise.
- Reiterate terms of consent form and procedures for withdrawing from the study if so desired
- Reiterate the value of their contribution and confirm the preferred method to receive their gift card