Examining Sense of Self Among College Student Athletes

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Dedication

This project is dedicated to my parents, Dan and Margaret Essler, because without their support, both spiritually and financially, this would not have been possible. In addition, their lifelong dedication to high school student athletes has been admirable.

Abstract

The sense of self of human being and the development of the sense of self has been researched for many years. There has also been research on college student athletes and how college student athletes fit on a college campus compared to traditional students. The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine how the experience of being a college student athlete at a Midwest university influences their sense of self and how their sense of self evolves during the college experience. The study conducted two 90-minute focus group interviews, and the participants in this study were Division II football players. The participants discussed their experiences in college and how those experiences developed their sense of self. The researcher found that challenging experiences and the relationships the college student athletes had with their teammates influenced their sense of self the most. These findings will inform the practices of coaches, athletic administration and university faculty.

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Chapter One

Introduction

The increased level of popularity and attention of college sports in the past decade, especially at the NCAA Division I level, has been a major topic among university administrators, college coaches and players, and avid sports fans. According to *Sports Illustrated* (2016), the NCAA football national title game in 2016 had 25.7 million viewers on ESPN, which was even down from the previous year when 33.8 million people watched Ohio State University take on the University of Oregon. Since the popularity has increased, the competition and level of play has also risen, which has caused college coaches to overwork the athletes and force them to be an athlete first. The participants of college sports can be identified as "student athletes," but many administrators and fans have questioned what that term actually means. The reasoning behind the controversy of the term "student athletes" has been validated because, as Bowen and Levin (2003) state, "In no other country in the world is athletics so embedded within the institutional structure of higher education as in the United States" (p. 1). A college student athlete is a full-time college student and full-time athlete, which has its benefits and detriments, both short and long term. The student athlete experience is unique and can be much different from a traditional college student's experience because of the additional experiences that athletics provides. Furthermore, experiences that college student athletes have can influence and evolve their sense of self during their college years. With an extensive evaluation, the term "student athlete" became much more complex, especially when researching the factors that lead to their success or even failure.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine how the experience of being a college student athlete at a Midwest university influences their sense of self and how their sense of self evolves during the college experience.

Background and Significance of the Study

Since college athletics have become more competitive in the last decade, coaches have become more demanding on their student athletes. The amount of time that student athletes are required to spend on their sport is more controlled compared to the late 1990's, but it still can be considered a full time job. There are many advantages and disadvantages to being a college student athlete and many factors can determine student athlete's success.

Harrison (2009) focused on the perception of student athletes and their identity and how it affects them in the classroom. Many people mature and find their identity during their college years because of their experiences and situations they have to overcome. A college student athlete's identity is different from a traditional college student's identity because of the additional responsibilities they hold. Therefore, this was helpful research because most studies focus on traditional college students' identity and not college student athletes' identities. Although Harrison's research was helpful, it mainly focused on classroom success. Harrison's research (2009), "focuses on the different motivational processes that impact the academic performance" (p. 78). In addition, Watt and Moore III (2001) state, "Student athletes receive positive and negative reinforcement from their surroundings. These reinforcements can facilitate development of an identity as student and athlete or can encourage the student athlete to focus on one element of that identity to the detriment of the other" (p. 13). The one issue with Watt and

Moore's research was that it did not go in-depth with how time commitment plays a role in identity development.

According to Petrie and Stoever (1997), "Recently, researchers have examined nonacademic factors that may influence student athletes' academic performance (p. 599)." The research conducted by Petrie and Stoever is important research for professors and administration so athletes get the resources and attention they need. Petrie and Stoever's research would have been more influential, but they focused on female athletes only. Miller and Kerr's (2002) also presented meaningful research on academic performance of college student athletes, however, their focus was on Canadian student athletes at large universities. There is need for additional research on college student athletes at a NCAA Division II school that spend the similar amount of time on athletics, but do not receive the resources that many NCAA Division I athletes receive.

The team structure and the role of the coach significantly affects the student athlete immensely, both in the classroom and in competition. The head coach of the team is the main person that determines the amount of time the athletes must commit to the sport. Therefore, the student athletes' identity can also be affected by the role and behavior of the coach. In a study on coaches and their relationship with athletes, which was conducted by Zourbanos, Theodorakis, and Hatzigeorgiadis (2006), the results stressed the importance of the coach's behavior and esteem support.

In NCAA Division II athletics, the majority of student athletes are not on full athletic scholarships, which adds another factor that influences their identity development. There has been ample research on NCAA Division I student athletes and their college experience but limited research on NCAA Division II student athletes. Lally and Kerr (2005) researched why

student athletes are poor at planning their careers for after athletics, but it never mentions the ability to participate in internships or jobs that relate to their interested career. Since most NCAA Division II athletes are not on full athletic scholarships, they need a job to help them get through college. These student athletes might not be able to get internships because many of them do not pay well or do not pay at all.

Given the limited research on Division II student athletes, the purpose of the present study was to examine their college student athlete experiences and the effect the experiences had on their sense of self. The research questions that guided the study were:

1. How do student athletes identify themselves during their college experience?
2. How do perceptions affect the sense of self among college student athletes?
3. What experiences influence and foster growth of the sense of self among college student athletes?
4. Who influences and fosters growth of the sense of self among college student athletes?

Setting

Participants for the study were NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) football players at a regional Midwest university. The participants were Division II football players, ranging from 20-25 years old. The student athletes were current athletes, or have used their fifth year of eligibility during the 2016-2017 year, and were at least in their third year of eligibility. Participants were also enrolled as full-time students with identified majors.

Assumptions

The researcher was a college student athlete and experienced how his own sense of self evolved during the college experience. The sense of self is constantly evolving and the process of

that evolution is different in a college student athlete in comparison to a traditional college student because of the additional experiences college student athletes have.

The researcher chose college student athletes that participate in football because of the larger number of possible participants. The participants were current college student athletes in at least their third year of eligibility and were enrolled as full-time students.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

This phenomenological study was conducted to examine how participating in a collegiate sport influenced the sense of self and how it evolved during the course of the college experience. The aspects examined were the student athletes' experiences in their sport and their student life. The study's participants were NCAA Division II football players from a university in the Midwest.

The study did not include student athletes from any sport other than football. The information gathered in the focus group interviews was more beneficial because the participants were familiar with each other and comfortable with sharing experiences.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the sense of self among college student athletes and the influence of the college experience has on their developing sense of self. This study's aim is to provide meaningful information for coaches, athletic administration and other faculty members that work with student athletes to help develop the sense of self in college student athletes.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

College student athletes have multiple roles and responsibilities and are part of an exclusive group on most college campuses. Student athletes have games, practices, mandatory in-season and off-season workouts, mandatory study sessions, and volunteering hours along with being full-time college students. Harrison (2009) adds, "Unlike traditional students (i.e., those who do not participate in college athletics), they are part of a complex social and political system within the university" (p. 78). The purpose of this study was to examine aspects of student athletes' experiences that shape their sense of self and how their sense of self evolves during their college experiences.

The student athlete's sense of self was important to examine because of the significant role identity has in the development of a young adult. Furthermore, the student athlete's sense of self can lead to various stereotypes that affect the young adult, both positive and negative. College student athletes were researched because of the various experiences they have during their college years. College student athletes use the majority of their time in academics, playing their sport, and social settings, and those aspects of their lives play a major role in the development of their sense of self.

The Life of College Student Athletes

College student athletes are pulled in many different directions during their four or five years of college with their commitment to athletics, academics, extracurricular activities, social life, and rest. Time management and the specific areas where they commit their time is one of the most important factors in determining success for the student athlete. During the season, coaches are able to spend more time with their athletes and better able to keep track of them.

Time management helps student athletes with setting a routine and the ability to focus on the important elements of being a student athlete. In contrast, the team structure can hurt the student athlete because of the pressure that comes from coaches and community members to perform well on the field.

With 24 hours in a day and 168 hours in a week, the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) limits the amount of mandatory time coaches can have with their athletes at 25 hours per week and at least one day completely off. Student athletes know that they commit much more than 25 hours a week to their sport during the season. Moreover, Gayles and Hu (2009) found, "Despite the limits enforced by the NCAA, a recent survey on student athletes' experiences on college campuses reported that football players at Division I institutions spend well over 40 hours per week on athletic related activities" (p. 316). That statistic is startling considering the normal work week for a full-time employee in the United States is 40 hours.

Academics and athletics. Stress and anxiety are variables that are often forgotten when managing athletics and academics. Petrie and Russell (1995) found that lower GPAs were associated with stress and anxiety, specifically competitive trait anxiety. Stress and anxiety hinders many college students' academics, but stress and anxiety is heightened when competing in college athletics. Considering college student athletes have a bigger time commitment to sports than their peers that are not in a sport, some believe they could perform just as well as their peers. Singer (2008) found, "The African American males in this study felt that they were constantly being put into positions where they had to make a choice between devoting their time to football or other educational experiences" (p. 405). Many athletes have to make this choice, and the choice becomes harder when coaches are putting pressure on the athletes.

There is debate as to whether student athletes perform better academically during the season or in the off-season. Maloney and McCormick's (1992) research stated, "We find that the negative residual grade performance occurs during the season of participation. In football, the revenue sport with a well-defined season, grades are lower in season than they are out of season" (p. 570). The demands of each specific sport is different and students can take harder course loads during the season or off-season. In research dedicated to women athletes, Petrie and Stoever (1997) discovered that when upper-level student athletes take less credit hours during the season and more credits in the off-season, their academic performance does not differ. Upper-level students are more likely to be consistent because they have become more comfortable with college and are able to cope with the stress.

Coaches' Role in the Life of a College Student Athlete. When a student athlete first steps onto campus during their freshman year, they are directly involved with the team's program. The head coach, the leader of the program, will have a significant impact on the student athlete during the four or five years while that athlete is on campus. Coaches have a major impact on how much the team emphasizes winning, academics, community service, and the amount of hours, with NCAA regulations, the athlete needs to commit each week. In addition, the coach's behavior can affect student athletes' identity and self-esteem in the way in which things are communicated and perceived.

The relationship between the coach and player is based on the behavior of both parties and the way those behaviors are perceived. In order for the coach to implement the culture, or motivational goals, the players must respect and believe in what the coach is preaching. Furthermore, a student athlete's experience is a correlation between the player and coach's relationship and the relationships the player has with their teammates. In a study that researched

coaching behaviors, Cumming, Smith and Smoll (2006) found, "The behaviors of coaches play a major role in the athletic environment and influence performance, skill acquisition, enjoyment, group processes, and the psychosocial growth of athletes" (p. 212). The attributes listed in their research signifies the level awareness coaches must have on their day-to-day interactions with student athletes. Communication is the key to all successful relationships and is certainly a major factor in a positive culture. Kenow and Williams' (1999) research found that when coaches support their players and communicate effectively, their relationship between the player and coach is more compatible. When a student athlete feels more supported by their program, they are more likely to benefit from the sport. Coaches can have major influence on student athletes, which can certainly be beneficial. Some coaches may overlook the seriousness that each interaction plays and the long-term effect it has on student athletes.

The Program's Culture. There are athletic programs that emphasize winning on the field or court and make that the team's only goal during the season. The "win at all cost" mentality certainly can have a positive impact on a student athlete's experience because of the benefits that correlate with winning. For the most part, winning is enjoyable and can establish popularity amongst teammates, peers and faculty. In contrast, the "win at all cost" mentality can also be detrimental to the student athlete. If student athletes are only focusing on their sport, then their academic performance and social life might be negatively affected. As stated before, there are many aspects to being a college student athlete, and the ability to manage those aspects is crucial.

If the head coach of the program wants the players on the team to be well-rounded individuals, then the program will emphasize more than just winning. Ames and Archer (1988) provided research on performance and mastery goals in a classroom setting and the effectiveness

of each type of motivational climate. "A performance goal reflects a valuing of ability and normatively high outcomes. With a mastery goal, importance is attached to developing new skills. The process of learning itself is valued, and the attainment of mastery is seen as dependent on effort" (p. 260). The climate of the team is determined by the types of goals, and they are set and carried out by the head coach. Furthermore, Pensgaard and Roberts (2002) found that it is important for coaches to understand the climate their athletes are in for them to succeed. If the program is geared towards mastery goals, or something similar to that, then the athlete is more likely to succeed.

Additional student engagement. In addition to committing time to athletics and academics, successful students make time for extracurricular activities or groups or interact with traditional students on campus. Gayles and Hu (2009) adds, "This suggests that the kinds of activities student athletes engage in during college have a greater impact on personal self-concept and learning and communication skills regardless of background such as race/ethnicity, gender, and major" (p. 328). It is proven that student athletes benefit from extracurricular activities and student engagement, but do they have enough time to participate? There have been studies that show both sides of the story. Singer (2008) found that student athletes do not have additional time to participate in activities that traditional students do. The participants in his study stated they go to class, which is then followed with about six hours of football. On the contrary, Gayles and Hu's (2009) stated, "Our findings suggest otherwise and the magnitude of this form of engagement was the strongest one among all the engagement measures in this study" (p. 327).

The Sense of Self

The study of humans and human behavior dates back to the late 1800s and has continued to evolve. Sigmund Freud, B.F. Skinner, Carl Rogers and many others were great contributors to contemporary psychological thought and research regarding the self. The self is different in every person and how a person views themself impacts their everyday behavior and how people treat others. Rogers suggests, "The implication is that objective reality (whatever that might be) is not the important determinant of our actions; rather, we react on the basis of how we view that reality" (Nye, 1975, p. 83). Furthermore, Leary and Tangney (2002) believe that traits, social relations, roles, and social groups factor into our identities. In addition, this section of the literature review explores the development of the self and how perceptions influence the concept of the self. Development of the self is crucial during adolescence and early adulthood for the person to reach their full potential. Furthermore, the way people perceive their feelings, emotions and actions is important in that development.

Development of Sense of Self. Carl Rogers, a former American psychologist and professor, dedicated the majority of his life's work researching the self and making contributions to the self-theory. Rogers still has an impact on current research on the self, and additionally, research on student athletes. Nelson, Cushion, Potrac and Groom (2012) used Rogers' theories of the self to guide their discussions on sport coach education and 'athlete-centered' coaching. As stated before, early adulthood is an important stage in the development of the sense of self, which evolves over the course of life with various experiences, emotions, and actions. An underlying theme in the literature is that the environment and the people an individual associates with plays a major role in developing the self. Carl Rogers' research explained the process of self-actualization and an individual's need of positive regard from a significant other. Furthermore, Smart and Pascarella (1986) found developmental growth patterns in college

students that participate in campus social systems, which indicate the environment matters in an individual's growth.

Research supports that the environment an individual is part of fosters development in the sense of self. In their study, *Self-Concept Development and Educational Degree Attainment*, Smart and Pascarella explored changes in the self-concept of college students over a nine-year period. Their research found, "The degree of student integration into the campus social system appears to be of critical importance given that it was the only variable that contributed significantly to all three self-concept developmental growth patterns" (Smart & Pascarella, p. 13). In addition, Jones and Deutsch (2013) researched social and identity development using participation-observation and interviews of students in an after-school program environment. "It is through the dual influence of supportive relationships and the developmentally appropriate programs that are the contexts for these interactions that, according to the youths' report of their experiences, Midtown aids them in their social and personal development" (Jones and Deutch, 2013, p. 37).

Another factor in the development of the self is the type of activities a person is involved in and the commitment level to those activities. Crocetti, Rubini and Meeus (2008) studied identity formation in regards to commitment, in-depth exploration and reconsideration of commitment, and concluded that commitment is a strong indicator of positive identity development (p. 219). In Crocetti, Rubini, and Meeus' (2008) study, commitment was defined as, "making a relatively firm choice about an identity domain and engaging in significant activities geared toward the implementation of that choice" (p. 208). The activities that people commit themselves to have a great effect on their sense of self.

Perceptions Effect Sense of Self. Many young adults have an idea of how they are perceived by their close friends and peers. Furthermore, some of them probably care how they are perceived, which has an effect on their sense of self. Early research by Carl Rogers has proved that the way people are affected by other's perceptions can impact their self-regard or, "one's view of one's own worth" (Nye, 1975, p. 94). In addition, Rogers believes a, "person has regard for himself or herself only when he or she thinks, feels, and acts in certain specified ways; other thoughts, feelings, and actions (which have not been accepted by significant others) are considered unworthy and tend to be excluded from one's self-concept in order to maintain self-regard" (Nye, 1975, p. 94). Although perceptions are generally discussed as negative, the self can benefit from them. Rogers used the terms "unconditional positive regard" and "conditional positive regard" to explain how people are effected by others' perceptions, specifically those that are significant others. "Unconditional positive regard is received when a person perceives that all of his or her self-experiences (feelings, thoughts, sensations, and so on) are equally worthy of positive regard" and the significant other accepts the individual for who that person is and not based on single acts (Nye, 1975, p. 95). Conditional positive regard is received when the individual perceives that he or she is being judged by the significant other on separate instances. Furthermore, Rogers believes to grown as an individual and move toward self-actualization, he or she needs to receive unconditional positive regard.

The sense of self is also affected by social perception, or stereotypes, and expectations from others in their environment. Since the sense of self is affected by stereotypes, the behavior in people can change as well. In a study on behavioral confirmation, Snyder and Swann (1978) stated, "Our empirical investigation suggests that social perceptions can and do exert powerful channeling effects on subsequent social interaction such that actual behavioral confirmation of

these beliefs in produced" (p. 157). Furthermore, in another study conducted by Snyder, Tanke, and Berscheid (1977), their research suggested "that stereotypes can and do channel interaction so as to create their own social reality" (p. 663). Behavioral confirmation of certain stereotypes can cause harm to young adults' sense of self, especially college students living in a new environment.

Sense of Self of College Student Athletes

College is an important time in life for young people because it is most often the first time they move away from their parents and become more independent. As stated before, the college student athlete has many roles within the campus setting, between participating in athletics, community service and attending class. The way student athletes identify themselves and the stereotypes they represent or get placed into effect their behavior and the treatment they receive from their professors and peers. The possibilities to find identity as a student, as an athlete, or a student athlete are difficult.

The Effects of Peer and University Faculty Stereotypes on Student Athletes.

Stereotypes are prevalent in society by categorizing people by gender, race or ethnicity, and religious beliefs. These types of stereotypes can also be found on most college campuses in the United States. Harrison (2009) found that negative stereotypes from faculty, traditional students, and other administration members have on student athletes has become one of the major pressures college athletes face. Negative stereotypes against student athletes could refer to favoritism from professors, not showing up to class, or presenting a big ego. Because college students are at the point in their lives that their identity is developing, it is important for student athletes to neglect the negative stereotypes.

Perception also plays a major role in identity, which can affect their academic performance. If faculty and students on college campuses perceive student athletes as "just" athletes and not students, the behavior of student athletes may change and have a negative impact on academic success. "The increased concern imposed by the identity threat adds an additional psychological burden to the task, which in turn reduces an individual's ability to perform up to their potential" (Harrison, 2009, p. 80). Since college student athletes can be prominent figures on campus, the negative effect is only heightened. In addition, Simons, Bosworth, Fujita and Jensen (2007) explain:

> Athletes may believe at some level that they lack the intellectual ability to succeed academically. This belief then becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy in which athletes try to avoid or resist academic situations where they feel inadequate by engaging in self-handicapping behaviors such as poor attendance, lateness, non-participation in class discussions, lack of interest, ect. (p. 5)

College student athletes are in a tough situation that they must overcome to become successful during and after their college years.

Even though many college student athletes are stereotyped as "just" athletes, some student athletes respond by fighting the stigma. They work harder on their academics for better grades and try to stand out for being a good student and not only an athlete.

The way the college student athletes are perceived by their peers and professors has an impact on their identity and college success. College student athletes are not able to avoid or choose the stereotype, just like any other type of stereotype. There are both positive and negative effects to these perceptions, but they are commonly affected negatively when it comes to academics. In the study conducted by Simons, Bosworth, Fujita and Jensen (2007), the

research showed that athletes reported mainly negative treatment by university faculty with some positive treatment because of their athlete status. Many people do not believe that college student athletes are concerned about their athletic or "dumb-jock" stereotype because of the assumed privileges they receive. Current student athletes can also be negatively stereotyped because of past student athletes that skipped class, failed classes or didn't complete assignments.

One perception from traditional students and faculty of student athletes is that they receive preferential and more lenient treatment from university faculty because they are not intelligent enough to succeed as students in their major. Simons, Bosworth, Fujita and Jensen (2007) found in their study on the stigma of college student athletes, "40.7% of the student comments expressed the view that athletes lack intelligence and do not deserve to be students at the university" (p.11). This can be harmful to student athletes and the way they view themselves because

When student athletes are stereotyped by their peers and university faculty, the affects can be negative and worsened when the athlete believes the stereotype. The college student athlete needs to fight the stigma and find their own personal identity. Carl Rogers believes, "if people are freed from restricting, corrupting social influences, they can achieve a high level of personal and interpersonal functioning and can avoid the reality distortion that prevent the achievement of ever-greater growth and fulfillment" (Nye, p. 84). The earlier student athletes can rid of their prior perception of how college student athletes behave and ignore negative perceptions from others, the faster they can grow as humans and find what aspects of their life they want to take more seriously.

Identifying as a Student or Athlete. As previous research found and was stated above, the role the college student athlete identifies with is a major factor in the academic success and

psychological well-being of the student athlete. There are many factors that lead into identifying as a student, an athlete or both, such as the sport the student athlete plays, the number of hours that are put into playing and practicing the sport, and their motivation for a successful career after college sports. Identifying as a student and attempting to fight the stigma, the student athlete will more likely be primed for academic success. If the student athlete identifies as an athlete, the student athlete is more likely to focus their attention and time to athletics and their academic performance is more likely to decline. Simons, Bosworth, Fujita and Jensen (2007) add, "One's social identity can be devalued in one context but not in another context. The context dependent nature of stigma is clearly seen for athletes whose athletic identity is stigmatized in the academic domain but highly valued in the athletic domain" (p. 4).

Even though college student athletes cannot choose the perception they receive from their peers and university faculty, they have the ability to internally choose their identity. College athletics can often be time consuming, which is a factor of how student athletes sees themselves. In one qualitative study, Singer (2008) found:

> Throughout the focus group and the individual interviews these athletes discussed the 'struggle' associated with trying to balance the student athlete roles. In fact, the expectations and time demands placed on these athletes by their coaches in particular were so great that these athletes refused to refer to themselves as 'student-athletes' (p. 403).

As stated earlier, the student athlete has a major role in determining whether to identify as a student, an athlete, or student athlete, but the team structure and coaches also have an important role. Student athletes benefit socially and psychologically the more they identify as a student and connect with their peers. Gayles and Hu (2009) supported this theory when he wrote:

> The evidence from this study supports that exposing student athletes in meaningful ways to their non-athlete peers makes a difference in terms of how they view themselves, their cultural attitudes, and reported gains in learning and communication skills (p. 329).

Summary

The existing literature was meaningful information on studies or theories that have researched the college student athlete, the sense of self and the sense of self of college athletes. Prior research on student athletes found that participating in a sport provided different experiences than traditional students. The research suggested that student athletes' academic and athletic success could be determined by the amount of time that they dedicated to one or the other. Furthermore, the sense of self could also be affected by the amount of time dedicated to the sport or how other perceived them.

Chapter Three

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine how the experience of being a college student athlete at a Midwest university influences their sense of self and how their sense of self evolves during the college experience. Both qualitative and quantitative research has been conducted on the sense of self and college student athletes, but this study aimed for a better understanding of the experiences and people that influenced their sense of self. In this study, the college student athlete experience was stressed over their athletic and academic success.

The researcher in this qualitative study conducted two focus group interviews with college student athletes to examine their college experience and the influences that shaped their sense of self. This chapter describes the settings and participants in detail with the types of athletes, the structure of the interviews and the interview location

Research Design

In this phenomenological study, two focus group interviews with college student athlete participants were conducted in order to gather data about the college student athlete to describe their experiences and the influences it had on the development of their sense of self. According to Creswell, "Focus groups are advantageous when the interaction among interviewees will likely yield the best information and when interviewees are similar to and cooperative with each other" (p. 218). The researcher chose the focus group method because he wanted to interview multiple football players to take advantage of the dynamic of a group conversation. A college football team usually consists of over 100 players, so there are many different personalities and experiences. Conducting two focus group interviews allowed for more participants than individual interviews. Including players from the same team helped the conversation and more

information was gathered. Since the participants were on the same team, they were comfortable about sharing their experiences. The researcher was able to remove himself, to a certain extent, from the conversation, which allowed the participants to converse freely and describe their experiences.

The research adopted a phenomenological design for the study. Creswell (2012) believes that one of the major characteristics in qualitative research is to gain a detailed understanding of a central phenomenon. "A central phenomenon is the key concept, idea or process studied in qualitative research" (Creswell, 2012, p. 16). Furthermore, a phenomenological method emphasizes rich description of an experience or phenomena based on the experiences and description of those who live the experience. This study was effective because the design yielded answers that observed emotions, feelings and behaviors. A major part of the study involved how the student athletes identified themselves, and the interview process allowed the participants to expand on their identities.

Setting and Participants

The setting for this study was at a liberal arts university that is part of a state system and consists of NCAA Division I and Division II athletes. The university's athletic department consisted of 14 NCAA Division II teams and 2 NCAA Division I teams. The two 90-minute focus group interviews were conducted in a conference room in the athletic building. The mantra for this university's athletic department emphasized the classroom, competition and community, and their teams have had success nationally and in their conference. In addition to their athletic success, their student athletes succeeded in the classroom with an overall grade point average over 3.0 last year (2016).

The participants of this qualitative study were thirteen male football players at a Midwest NCAA Division II university. The football team was chosen by the researcher as the setting for this study because of the known amount of time the players commit to athletics and their recent success on the field and in the classroom. The participants were Division II football players, ranging from 20-25 years old. The student athletes were current athletes, or have used their fifth year of eligibility during the 2016-2017 year, and were at least in their third year of eligibility. In addition, the participants were student athletes that were enrolled as full-time students with identified majors. There were 39 college student athletes that fit the criteria for this study, and 13 of those qualified players participated in the study. The potential participants were gathered after practice one day for the recruitment meeting. At the meeting, they were able to sign up for a time that would work for them. They were then contacted, via email, by the researcher following the meeting with their assigned room and time. Eight of the participants were going to be juniors (fourth year of eligibility) and five of them were going to be seniors (fifth year of eligibility).

Data Gathering and Analysis

The researcher conducted two 90-minute focus group interviews. The first questions asked the participants to think back to their early years of their college experience and what they thought about themselves and how others perceived them. Further questions followed asking the participants to discuss the experiences and the people that they believed to influence them the most or helped them grow and mature. In addition, they discussed part of the transition of their sense of self. The last set up questions encouraged them to discuss perceptions and how those

perceptions affect them. The researcher encouraged the participants to talk about everything in their college experiences, not just athletics or academics.

Both focus group interviews were audio recorded and catalogued for analysis purposes. Excerpts from the interviews were also transcribed for analysis and reporting purposes. Analysis involved an adaptation of the constant comparative method. The first layer of analysis involved identifying topics and patterns within each interview. The second layer of analysis involved identifying common topics and patterns across interviews to then identify themes. Creswell (2012) supports this by stating, "The result may also include themes or broad categories that represent your findings" (p. 18). The researcher then drew from both interviews to identify excerpts which illustrated each respective theme and constructed the descriptions of each theme reported in the following chapter.

Chapter Four

Results and Discussion

This chapter presents the findings of the analysis of the two focus group interviews with the college student athletes. This study aimed to examine the sense of self among student athletes and how their college experience influenced their sense of self. In the analysis of the focus group interviews, three themes became apparent. This chapter provides descriptions of the themes and returns to the literature to situate the findings in the field. Lastly, a summary is provided that discusses the meaning of the findings and how it adds to the literature in the field.

Results

Changes of the sense of self. College student athletes come into their first year with a very similar sense of self that they had during high school. For many, high school education is not a main focus because of the level of difficulty or the lack of thought about their career plans. Therefore, the students that play sports, specifically the more talented athletes, tend to focus more on athletics than academics. In addition, others see these student athletes spend more time and energy on sports and place stereotypes on them. The perception of the self and from others of being "just" an athlete can start early in high school and carry into their college years.

There isn't much time for growth in the sense of self from high school graduation to arriving on a college campus. Therefore, the way college student athletes view themselves as freshmen are similar to their high school identities. In the aspect of the perception of only being an athlete, the participants discussed the role recruiting had on their sense of self. High school athletes that are interested in playing a sport in college need to be recruited by college coaches, and this process can start as early as freshman year of high school. The recruiting process extends all the way until the student athlete makes their decision on which university to attend

and play a sport. One participant in the first interview discussed that fact that being recruited labels you as a football player and others see that as well. Another participant had a similar stance and stated, *"The decision to come to this college was based on me, the football player, and not as a student."*

When high school student athletes prioritize athletics over other aspects of life, they become much more comfortable in that environment. In turn, that environment influences their beliefs and actions. Research by Smart and Pascarella (1986) found that the environment an individual is part of fosters development of a person's the sense of self (p. 13). Many participants in the study believed, in high school, their athletics were more important and school was not as serious. One participant stated, *"A lot of my strengths as a person have come from playing sports and football, so I kind of identified that as who I am."* When this identity forms, it becomes how the student athletes think of themselves, along with how others think of them. Furthermore, it may become how their peers and others recognize these student athletes in the community. *"When I go back home…people recognize me as a football player instead of a student."* A few others agreed with that participant's statement. With age and experiences, these athletes realized there were other important aspects to life that needed attention as well.

Coming into their freshman year, the majority of the participants viewed themselves as football players because that was their main priority. With that mindset, that is also how some of them viewed themselves all the way to their second year. It became apparent during the interviews that adding more priorities altered their perspective of what being a college student athlete meant. One participant added, *"I saw myself as a football player and some of that had to do with my major classes. I wasn't taking classes towards my degree."* In addition, another participant did not take academics as serious because he did not know what career path to

choose. Others also agreed that once they started to focus on a major and thinking about their career, football was not the only thing on their mind. When reflecting on his transition, one participant explained he felt change once he started to focus on other aspects of life. For example, as a freshman, he tried to figure out what major to declare and now he is trying to find a job that will set him up for the future. Another stated, *"Football was my life as a freshman. I still love football the same, but now I realize that football ends and there is more to life than football. That realization was a big step for me."* Moreover, *"My self-image has changed more from strictly football player that goes to school, to football player that is striving for something more, getting a job and career."*

The realization that taking academics serious is important for their career after football had a profound impact on their sense of self. In addition, knowing that playing football will end and that life goes on after football. One participant noted, *"Motivations change as you get older."* The participants agreed that finding other things in life to value other than football was a big step towards their growth and maturity. *"I guess through the years you just learn more about yourself and the things you value and don't value…I've learned what I like and don't like."* The ability to reflect on the self and finding what is important to that person fosters growth.

The theme of the changes of the sense of self addressed how college student athletes identify themselves and how perceptions of others affected their sense of self. Some of the participants viewed themselves differently once they started to get involved in other things outside of football. In turn, others did not view them solely as athletes. As stated in the literature review, the self is constantly developing and can change in the course of a couple months based on experiences and reflecting on those experiences.

Experiences fostered growth in the sense of self. Participants discussed at great lengths about the experiences that helped them grow and find a better understanding of who they are. They pointed out that difficult situations, whether it was an injury or family conflict, helped them gain another perspective about life. Difficult situations made a couple participants reflect on what was important to them. Some of the participants also discussed the role of adding new responsibilities in their life, such as becoming one of the older players on the team or living without any supervision, fostered their identity development. Carl Rogers found that the development in the self comes from reflecting and being open to those experiences (Nye, p. 90). The participants became passionate when discussing difficult experiences and a couple of them even got emotional while describing the experience. One participant described how his family dealt with their house being burned down and realized his time and energy needed to be more focused on his family than football or school. Another participant described the experience of dealing with a family member having cancer and how it brought the family closer.

The participants reflected on experiences in which they established new responsibilities such as, whether they were ready for those responsibilities or not. It can be a challenge for young adults to go to college and move away from home and not have parents to lean on. One participant discussed how that experience made him more mature and stated, *"You're an 18 year old kid who has lived with his parents his whole life and don't really know how to take care of yourself. I guess you're forced to grow and that's what has made me change."* Another added, *"It's like sink or swim at that point.*" Whether a person is ready for that experience or not, the ability to get through that difficult situation affects the self. Another participant had a similar experience, *"The biggest jump I felt was moving out of the dorms and into that first house. It's*

very eye opening…There is a lot of stuff you're just not used to doing and it's a completely new experience."

The participants were also forthcoming about the growth they felt when they assumed leadership roles, both in their majors and on the team. There was a discussion about the difference between freshman year and their current status on the team and that it changed from being a follower to being a leader. As a freshman, many of them just wanted to fit in become more comfortable with everything. Now, they are the older players on the team and that brings more responsibility. One participant referred to a time when he was the oldest player at a work out and thought to himself, *"Whoa, you have to step up and be a leader now."* Another described taking a leadership role as a *"wake up call." "I needed to make changes and mature more and prioritize what you have to do. I didn't want to let them (teammates) down…That part matured me in multiple aspects."*

The experiences the participants described were both in their personal life and being part of the team. They experienced growth and used words like "mature," "change," "wake up call" and "biggest jump" to describe these changes. These experiences came with getting older and maturing, but there were also experiences that helped them grow they described as hardships.

The participants described how personal hardships and injuries changed their perspective on life and priorities. One participant got emotion when he described the time his family's house burned down, which happened almost two years ago. After describing what that situation was like he stated, *"This (football) is such a small part of our life."* The topic of personal hardships and injuries relates to the discussion of realizing there are other aspects in life that are equally important.

Another participant described how his football related injuries made him stronger and realize the importance in what he is doing. *"The couple injuries I've had made me take a step back and think about why I am putting in all the work I do. Thinking about what matters long term."* A couple others added that the lessons they have learned from football is training them for their future. *"Those things that were hard and the struggles have become a little easier."*

The theme of growth of the sense of self through experiences addressed the influence their experiences have on the sense of self and its development in their college years. The participants discussed the idea that they learned the most in situations that they were not quite ready for. The ability to learn from those experiences, whether they were positive or negative experiences, is crucial in the development of their sense of self. This relates to Rogers' (1980) theory that reflectiveness and openness about those memorable experiences fosters growth.

Relationships with others. The theme, the relationship with others, was the most interesting of them all. The participants described how their relationships with their teammates and family members have influenced their sense of self the most. Many of the participants believed that being accepted as part of the team from the first day they arrived on campus was beneficial for their confidence. Some also agreed that having family members, specifically parents, helped shape their sense of self because they were able to call them for help anytime. Being able to talk to close family members parallels the findings of Jones and Deutsch (2013) on the belief that supportive relationships influence positive development within the self.

The participants were unified in that their teammates also have greatly influenced their sense of self and helped them grow. The conversation about their teammates was another emotional theme during the interview as they were reflecting upon their feelings about each other. Being part of a team puts college students in another environment that is unique to the

college experience, and as stated before, can affect the sense of self. *"When you get here (for football) you get put into a family with 100 guys and that family and relationships just grow."* Another aspect that makes the college student athlete experience unique]is the sacrifices made together as teammates, friends, and, as one participant stated, *"family."* Many college students do not have the luxury of having a whole team's support when tough personal situations arise. One participant described the type of influence the team's culture has had on him, specifically during the difficult times, when he stated, *"It's your best friends and the guys on the team. It just keeps you going. That's what has shaped me the most."*

Along with having support from the entire team and close friends, the participants described relationships they had with some of their older teammates and the impact those older teammates had on them in their earlier years. When they first arrived on campus, a few of the participants tried to emulate certain teammates that they admired. A couple of the participants explained they noticed this specific player's work ethic on and off the field, but this player also knew when to lighten up. One stated, *"You look up to the older guys and see all the qualities they have and try to blend them together."* There was a consensus among the group that an older group of players, *"actually took the effort and time to get to know us as a group."* One participant went onto describe his relationship with an older teammate and stated, *"This made me feel like we were actually friends and he's including me in on all things. You carry these relationships over to off the field."* These student athletes were able to experience a family atmosphere, which allowed them to feel comfortable with their personalities and beliefs. Without this unconditional positive regard, it would have been difficult for some of the participants to develop as individuals.

In addition, participants expressed that being part of the team had made them more responsible. One stated, *"I don't want to let them (teammates) down."* Not being responsible or not doing the right things can negatively affect the team and can be viewed as disrespecting the sacrifices the other teammates have made. Another participant declared that they all play for each other and explained, *"It takes a toll on us mentally and physically and we're all in this together. We know the things we go through and that is one of the things that has shaped me…We make sacrifices together to work towards this common goal."*

The relationships theme addressed how the participants were influenced and how the college experience fostered growth among college student athletes. The participants discussed their teammates throughout the interviews much more than they did about their close relatives. That relates to how much those surrounding the college student athletes can affect personality, beliefs, thoughts and behaviors.

Summary

Based on the analysis of the two focus group interviews, three important themes emerged regarding student athletes' sense of self and the college experience. The participants discussed the development of their sense of self. Many of them felt there was development when they had to balance their life between football and academics. In addition, they figured out academics would set them up for the future, which changed their focus football to both football and academics. The participants examined the experiences that also influenced their sense of self. Many provided stories and examples of situations that were difficult or they did not feel prepared for and the effects it had on them. There were also stories of acquiring new responsibilities, both with the team or in their major, such as internships, teaching experience or becoming a leader on

the team. The discussions about their change and the experiences that helped them grow were valuable; however, they were the most passionate when the discussion shifted to the influences their teammates had on them. Many agreed that, as freshman, they were able to look up to some of their older teammates for guidance. Furthermore, they felt that they had a family of over 100 people (teammates) that they could rely on when difficult situations arose. The focus group interviews provided meaningful information that contributed to existing literature.

Chapter Five

Summary and Conclusions

The present study sought to describe college student athletes' sense of self and the development of their sense of self during their college experience. The research set out to gain a better understanding of their experiences and the impact those experiences had on their developing sense of self. The participants described how they viewed themselves within the college campus and how their views changed during their college years. They discussed experiences that were new to them and unique situations that they needed to overcome, such as injuries and family troubles. The participants also discussed the relationships with their family, friends and teammates that influenced development and growth of their sense of self. The findings of the study provide purposeful information for coaches, athletic administrators and other faculty members that work with college student athletes. The recommendations provided in this chapter could be used to present opportunities or experiences for college student athletes that help foster positive growth to their sense of self. In addition, future research following the implications of the study is discussed.

Implications

Conducting focus group interviews with older college student athletes provided insight into the development of their sense of self and the experiences that influenced that growth during their first few years of college. The college experience is different for student athletes than it is for traditional college students and those unique experiences foster development. This study contributes to the field and parallels Harrison's (2009) research in which he found that the student athlete experience is different from a traditional student. Both studies suggest that participating in a college sport adds additional experiences that traditional students do not have

which ultimately impacts the development of the sense of self. Furthermore, Smart and Pascarella (1986) found when young adults are integrated into a campus social system; it contributes to the development of their self-concept. Findings in this study suggest that becoming part of the team culture, and college in general, develop the sense of self.

The results of the study also suggest recommendations for coaches, athletic administrators, and other faculty members that work with student athletes in attempt to enhance the student athlete experience. Since the participants were adamant about the influence their teammates have on each other, the discussion on team culture is important. The participants stressed experiences within the team setting that became useful in relating this study to prior research. In addition, they stressed that realizing there are aspects of their college experience, such as career, relationships and family, that are important and that their college experience is more than just football is important information for other campus faculty members that work with student athletes.

Team culture. The most passionate discussion in the interviews was the discussions about their teammates, which is why the culture of the team and how the athletes fit within that culture is important. The participants emphasized that their teammates helped develop their sense of self the most during their early years of their college experience. Coaches, specifically the head coach, set the culture of the team and the expectations within the culture. My first recommendation for coaches would be to provide team-building exercises, both in small and large group settings. Some participants noted that a few of their older teammates made them feel welcomed by building a relationship with them. They felt that these older teammates helped them grow during their first year of college. This recommendation is supported by Carl Rogers' theory of positive regard, which is the belief that the self needs love and acceptance (Nye, p. 93).

This suggests that team-building exercises will benefit young college student athletes because they will more likely feel acceptance from their teammates. In addition, the older teammates will be forced into a leadership role. Some athletic teams might not have a budget to support some beneficial team-building exercises; therefore, this recommendation is also important for athletic administrators.

The experiences of the participants also suggest that leadership opportunities fostered growth in the student athletes. Generally, leadership roles or opportunities within a team setting are granted to older members of the team. As the participants noted, those leadership roles had an impact on them, but coaches should consider giving freshman or younger athletes leadership opportunities as well. These leadership opportunities could occur in small group settings such as position groups, lifting groups, or in team-building exercises. In addition, the athletes should reflect on the experience by writing in a journal or turning in a brief summary. Research suggests if younger athletes are granted leadership experiences and are able to reflect on those experiences, it effects the growth of the sense of self (Koch, p. 198). Similarly, creating difficult scenarios and leaving room for mistakes will foster growth. Furthermore, coaches and athletic administration should emphasize being open and responsive to those scenarios.

The participants in this study also emphasized the realization that academics and preparing for the future was important and changed the way they viewed themselves. The interviews and existing literature suggest that coaches and athletic administration should stress the importance of academics and post-college career, especially for younger college student athletes. In addition, giving the student athletes various resources to support their academics is crucial. Petrie's and Stoever's (1997) research suggests that older students are more likely to be consistent in their academics because they are more comfortable with handling both athletics and

academics. Therefore, the earlier student athletes can handle both, the more successful they will be in the classroom. Contrary to the findings in this study, Singer found that some students felt they were forced to choose between devoting time to football or academics. After reflecting on their early years of college, the participants in this study found it helpful once they devoted more time academics and their career. Furthermore, coaches and athletic administration should set GPA goals for their teams and an overall goal for the athletic department. Concerning the goal setting, Ames and Archer (1988) found, "A performance goal reflects a valuing of ability and normatively high outcomes. With a mastery goal, importance is attached to developing new skills" (p. 206). Setting a standard for academic success will enhance the growth in the sense of self among student athletes.

Providing non-athletic based opportunities. Although athletics is a major part of a student athlete's college experience, it is important for coaches, athletic administration and other faculty members to consider encouraging student athletes to participate in additional activities, groups or organizations outside of the athletic department. Gayles' and Hu's (2009) research, based on a survey on student athletes' experiences, found that football players spend well over 40 hours per week on athletic activities (p. 316). Unless the NCAA decides to enforce further limitations on the number of hours, both voluntary and non-voluntary, athletes can spend on their sport, their hours committed to the sport is unlikely to change. Therefore, it is important for people that work with student athletes to consider assisting them to find and participate in additional activities or organizations. Furthermore, the experiences of the participants suggest that undergraduate work or internships can change their sense of self by realizing there will be life after sports.

Based on the findings that the participants' sense of self changed with the realization there is more to life than football, this study suggests that additional activities outside of athletics can help transform the sense of self to more than just an athlete. If not, a college student athlete's sense of self may not grow to its potential during the college experience. This study contributes to Gayles' and Hu's (2009) findings in that they, "suggest that the kinds of activities student athletes engage in during college have a greater impact on personal self-concept and learning and communication skills" (p. 328). These findings point us to better understand the importance of additional student engagement activities. Considering coaches want their athletes to spend as much time as possible to their sport, athletic administration and other faculty members should lead the charge in promoting clubs, organizations and various activities outside of athletics. In addition, athletic administration and other faculty members, in general, have closer ties to the clubs and organizations on campus.

In addition to participation in additional activities or groups, it is important to consider the value of internships or other career opportunities has on the college experience. The participants in this study agreed that focusing on their post-college plans changed their perspective. Furthermore, some participants told career related experiences that helped them grow. Since student athletes are very busy during their season, it is important for the athletic administration to consider working closely with career services to help student athletes. Those experiences will help student athletes realize the importance of their post-college career.

Recommendations for Future Research

After analyzing the focus group interviews and existing literature, additional questions arose and research ideas that could stem from this study. There are mixed findings on the

correlation between academic and athletic success, partially due to the specificity of each study. Research on this topic needs to be conducted for each sport because of the various amounts of time spent on the sport. In addition, the participants' high school academics should be involved in the research. Along with the academic performance topic, additional research could study the effects on academic achievement in correlation to when a student athlete declares a major. Since the participants suggested change in the sense of self when they started to focus on post-college plans, there could be a correlation between the time of declarations and academic performance.

After a team wins a game or competition, the consensus is that the members of that team are satisfied or happy. Additional research on student athletes' sense of self in correlation to the team's winning percentage could help both successful and unsuccessful teams. If a team is undefeated, are the members of the team perceived in a more positive way? Those perceptions can affect the sense of self of student athletes.

Summary

This study aimed to examine the sense of self among college student athletes and the experiences that help develop the sense of self. The focus group interviews provided meaningful information that coaches, athletic administration and other faculty members can use to help their student athletes on campus. Using the focus group method allowed the participants to describe their experiences in detail and explain how those experiences helped them grow. College athletics has become a business for major programs and the student athletes sometimes get lost in the mix. There needs to be a push by athletic and campus administration to bring back supports to the student athletes and make them a priority over the profits.

The findings presented in this study are steps in the right direction because the experiences of the participants suggest that the people close to them have more influence on

them than the outside world. Furthermore, with given the opportunity to learn from their experiences and mistakes the student athletes will develop as a whole. Although the student athletes have much control of their sense of self, there is a responsibility from coaches, athletic administration and other faculty members to help foster that development by providing meaningful experiences and additional support.

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Appendix I: IRB Approval Letter or Email

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Twin Cities Campus

Human Research Protection Program
Office of the Vice President for Research

D528 Mayo Memorial Building
420 Delaware Street S.E.
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APPROVAL OF SUBMISSION

April 19, 2017

Francis Guldbrandsen

218-726-8172 fguldbra@umn.edu

Dear Francis Guldbrandsen:

On 4/19/2017, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	Examining Sense of Self Among College Student Athletes
Investigator:	Francis Guldbrandsen
IRB ID:	STUDY00000148
Funding:	None
Grant ID/Con Number:	None
IND, IDE, or HDE:	None

Documents Reviewed:	• Group Presentation for Recruitment Meeting, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Consent Form, Category: Consent Form; • Social Protocal HRP 580.docx, Category: IRB Protocol; • Participation Sign Up Sheet.xlsx, Category: Recruitment Materials; • Focus Group Interview Questions.docx, Category: Other;

The IRB: Human Subjects Committee determined that the referenced study is exempt from review under federal guidelines 45 CFR Part 46.101(b) category #2 SURVEYS/INTERVIEWS; STANDARDIZED EDUCATIONAL TESTS; OBSERVATION OF PUBLIC BEHAVIOR.

In conducting this study, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within ETHOS.

Sincerely,

Jeffery Perkey, CIP, MLS
IRB Analyst

Appendix II

Interview Protocol

The interviews were focus group interviews that last almost 90 minutes. Both interviews were recorded with two devices. One group had six participants and the other had seven participants. All participants signed consent forms that affirmed their confidentiality and that they didn't have to answer anything they weren't comfortable with. Then I explained that I wanted to better understand the experiences that have helped them during their college career. The focus group interviews prompted better conversation.

Focus Group Interview Questions

- When you came in as a freshman, what did you think of yourself? Did you identify as only a football player, or only as a student, or both?
- How do you think other people viewed you?
    - How did other students view you?
    - How did parents view you?
- Some might view their college experience differently when they were a freshman compared to when they were seniors. As a freshman in college, how did you view your college experience?
    - In what ways have you changed since you first arrived on campus?
    - Who are you now compared to when you are a freshman?
- Some people can think back on certain experiences that influenced or helped them grow. Can you think of a time when you experienced something that changed the way you thought about yourself?
    - What experiences helped you transition from your freshman year to now?
    - As you think about your experience, who is someone that has really shaped you?
- People that are not student athletes have many stereotypes about student athletes. How have you responded to those perceptions?
    - Is there something people get wrong about you?
    - Who else are you than what people see?
    - What don't people see about you?
- What aspirations do you have for after you are a student athlete?

Appendix III

Title of Research Study: *Examining Sense of Self Among College Student Athlete*

Researcher: *Jacob Essler, University of Minnesota Duluth*

Supported By: This research is supported by Francis Guldbrandsen.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

You are invited to be in a research study of examining the sense of self of college student athletes. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a male student athlete at a NCAA Division II university. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in this study.

What should I know about a research study?

- Someone will explain this research study to you.
- Whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You can choose not to take part.
- You can agree to take part and later change your mind.
- Your decision will not be held against you.
- You can ask all the questions you want before you decide.
- Your participation in the study will not affect your status on the team or as a student in your major.

Who can I talk to?

For questions about research appointments, the research study, research results, or other concerns, call the study team at:

Researcher Name: Jacob Essler Phone Number: 320-212-0206 Email Address: jdessler@d.umn.edu	Study Staff: Francis Guldbrandsen Email Address: fguldbra@d.umn.edu

This research has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board (IRB) within the Human Research Protections Program (HRPP). To share feedback privately with the HRPP about your research experience, call the Research Participants' Advocate Line at 612-625-1650 or go to www.irb.umn.edu/report.html. You are encouraged to contact the HRPP if:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a research participant.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

Why is this research being done?

This study will examine how the experience of being a college student athlete at a midwest university influences their sense of self. This study will examine aspects of student athletes' experiences that shape their sense of self and how their sense of self evolves during their college experiences. Findings from this study may inform coaches, athletic program administrators and university administrators about the impact of the college student athlete experience toward program efforts to support student athletes.

How long will the research last?

We expect that you will be in this research study for 90 minutes.

How many people will be studied?

We expect about 6 or 7 people here will be in this research study out of 13 or 14 people in the entire study nationally.

What happens if I say "Yes, I want to be in this research"?

Participate in a focus group interview with six other football players. I will ask questions to the group and we will have a conversation about being a student-athlete. The interview will be recorded by two devices. The interview will last around 90 minutes. The interview will take place on the campus of the University of Minnesota Duluth in room 39 of the Sports and Health Center building. The door in the room will be closed. There will be refreshments and snacks for the participants.

What happens if I do not want to be in this research?

You can leave the research at any time and it will not be held against you.

What happens if I say "Yes", but I change my mind later?

You can leave the research at any time and it will not be held against you.

What happens to the information collected for the research?

Efforts will be made to limit the use and disclosure of your personal information, including research study and medical records, to people who have a need to review this information. We cannot promise complete secrecy. Organizations that may inspect and copy your information include the IRB and other representatives of this institution. The researcher will be the only person to have access to the recordings. Your names will not be provided on the research.

Signature Block for Capable Adult

Your signature documents your permission to take part in this research.

_____ _____

Signature of participant Date

_____

Printed name of participant

_____ _____

Signature of person obtaining consent Date

_____

Printed name of person obtaining consent