The freshman transition : an examination of the expectations and experiences of collegiate freshman female student-athletes

Malinda Anne Cooper
Iowa State University
The freshman transition: An examination of the expectations and experiences of collegiate freshman female student-athletes

by

Malinda Anne Cooper

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Major: Interdisciplinary Graduate Studies (Social Sciences)

Program of Study Committee:
Larry Ebbers, Major Professor
Susan Stewart
Jill Wagner

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2005

Copyright © Malinda Anne Cooper, 2005. All rights reserved.
This is to certify that the master’s thesis of
Malinda Anne Cooper
has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

Signatures have been redacted for privacy
When we remember that we are all mad, the mysteries disappear and life stands explained.  

-Mark Twain
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization of the Study</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO. Literature Review</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations and Experiences</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity Formation</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Services</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER THREE. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theories of Identity</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity Theory</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Identity Theory</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactionism (Symbolic Interactionism)</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FOUR. RESEARCH PROCESS</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Gathering</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensuring Confidentiality</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical Considerations</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introducing the Women</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FIVE. FINDINGS</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations and Experiences</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiencing Athletics and Academics in Their Daily Lives</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Services</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER SIX. WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Successful Transitioning 61
Integration of Freshman Female Student-Athletes 62
Recognition of Female Student-Athletes and Women’s Sports 64
The Path Not Taken 65
Conclusion 66
APPENDIX A. INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT 67
APPENDIX B. RESEARCH QUESTIONS 70
APPENDIX C. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION 77
REFERENCES 78
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study, in its current form, could not have been completed without the assistance of several key individuals. I would like to thank Dr. Susan Stewart for her direction, her time, and her friendship. I would like to thank Dr. Jill Wagner for continuing her committee membership as she focused on a new career path away from Iowa State University. I would like to thank Dr. Larry Ebbers for chairing my committee and getting me started on this new phase in my life.

To my mother...
In this study, I elaborate on the freshman transition by examining the expectations and experiences of freshman female student-athletes. Using identity theory, social identity theory, and interactionism, I explore identity formation as well as in-group and out-group boundary maintenance. Additionally, I explore the meanings freshman female student-athletes place on certain aspects of the freshman transition. Findings, based on in-depth interviews, reveal that female student-athletes could more positively experience the freshman transition through increased integration with the non-athletic aspects of collegiate life and through increased recognition of women’s sports. Although they face challenges navigating through the freshman transition, these women through various means are able to successfully manage the freshman transition. I offer suggestions to resolve the challenges freshman female student-athletes face and discuss implications for future research.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The transition from high school to college, referred to in this study as the freshman transition, signifies an important stage in any young adult’s life. It is a time when students formulize new academic and developmental goals that will impact future successes. Although it can be smooth and exciting for any student, it can also be overwhelming and problematic. For student-athletes, the transition experienced becomes magnified due to their particular condition. Not only must student-athletes adjust to a new physical and social environment but they must adjust to the demands of collegiate athletics while pursuing an academic degree.

As student-athletes, freshmen face many new experiences. Along with the rigors of collegiate academics, student-athletes must adapt to the rigors of collegiate sport such as new coaching styles and expectations, travel schedules that cause them to miss class during their competitive season, and fan expectations. Time commitments force major adjustments. For example, the freshman female student-athletes in this study spend, on average, 16-20 hours in class, 4 hours reviewing video tapes, 10-12 hours in structured practice, 4 hours in conditioning or weights, 8-12 hours in structured study tables, and 7 hours in team meals per week. For a freshman, these time commitments as well as the other adjustments can dramatically affect how they navigate their first year in college.
While this freshman transition affects both males and females, this study investigates its impact on female freshman student-athletes from a mid-size NCAA D1-A Midwestern University. In collegiate athletics, females are a unique subgroup. As in mainstream society, females experience marginalization in collegiate athletics. This marginalization is so pervasive that the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) must continuously monitor universities’ compliance with Title IX (federal mandate that affords females equal participation in collegiate athletics). Perusing the latest NCAA report a reader can find that coaching salaries for females are less than males, more males than females are employed at all levels of collegiate athletics, and female sports function under lower budgets than male sports (“Factsheet” 2003). Comparing the fan support for female sports to male sports shows more discrepancies. Attending a women’s basketball game and a men’s basketball game at most universities will demonstrate the reduced fan interest in women’s sports. Perhaps this is a function of women’s level of support in society but few programs have been implemented to increase support.

In spite of this marginalization, female student athletes, on average, perform better academically than their male counterparts. The NCAA reports graduation rates on a four-class average of 53% for male student athletes and 69% for female student athletes (“2003 NCAA” 2003). At the university in this study, the average GPA for male student athletes was 2.67 while for female student athletes it was 3.11 during the Spring 2002 semester. Although female student athletes enter college with higher GPAs than male student athletes, the freshman transition can impact academic performance either positively or negatively. With increased academic standards as a college student and from the NCAA, how female student athletes respond during their freshman year affects future achievements.
While important, academics are only one aspect of the freshman transition. To gain insight into the weight of the freshman transition, it is necessary to understand how female student athletes identify, navigate, and experience their roles during this time period.

**Research Questions**

For the most part, qualitative research begins with a question from which more questions and hopefully a few answers emerge. This study is no different as I explore three research questions:

1) How do freshman female student-athletes at a mid-sized division I university in the Midwest feel about and evaluate their academic, athletic, and social expectations and experiences during the freshman transition?

2) How do freshman female student-athletes personally experience academics and athletics in their daily lives?

3) How do the support services offered by the athletic department facilitate the transition to the collegiate experience of freshman female student-athletes?

The first question addresses the academic, athletic, and social expectations of each woman for her freshman semester. It allows for the consideration of what it means to be a student-athlete. Also, it looks at the adjustments the women make and the strategies the women employ to meet with success (as defined by them).

The second question examines the construction and internalization of identities these women undertake as female student-athletes. Specifically, this question looks at the negotiation involved in identity formation. Along with this, the roles associated with these
identities are examined to illustrate the influence they have on behaviors, boundaries, and expectations.

The third question evaluates the treatment and assistance the women receive from their athletic department as they navigate the freshman transition. While the amount of assistance deemed necessary might differ between the women, there should still be a general level of support available to each woman. As a special population entering a new phase of their life course, freshman female student-athletes need guidance in the highly regulated, highly competitive culture of collegiate athletics from the organization that facilitated their entry into this new culture. This question provides the women as well as myself with the opportunity to evaluate the athletic department’s support services.

Underlying all three of these questions is the potential influences of gender. Although these questions do not specifically examine the marginalization (or lack there of) experienced by these women in collegiate athletics, they allow me to understand how the women view themselves as female student-athletes through the gender lens.

**Organization of the Study**

The layout of the study is as follows. Chapter two reviews the most prominent literature relating to this study. Due to the lack of research on female student-athletes, I must rely upon studies that investigate the experiences of male student-athletes. This is representative of the marginalization experienced by women in collegiate sports. Although some of the literature is contradictory in that the participating in collegiate athletics can positively and negatively impact student experiences, many of the insights relate well to a study of freshman female student-athletes.
Chapter three introduces the theoretical frameworks informing this study. My emphasis involves the contributions of the actor in identity construction. A negotiated sense of self underlies the perspectives of identity theory, social identity theory, and interactionism.

Chapter four describes the research methods employed in this study. For this qualitative study, I interviewed twelve freshman female student-athletes from six different sports at a mid-size Midwestern university. This chapter also introduces the women individually to the reader.

Chapter five contains this study’s major results. The results address the three questions governing this study. They present a perspective that enhances one’s understanding of freshman female student-athlete identity.

The final chapter presents the implications of the freshman transition on female student-athletes and directions for future research. I discuss the most prominent issues uncovered via this study as well as some possible resolutions. Additionally, this chapter provides a discussion of the topics I chose not to address, given the scope of this project.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Through my investigations, I have found that a gap in the literature exists concerning female student-athletes. This gap is even more severe for minority female student-athletes (Person, Benson-Quaziena, and Rogers 2001:62). The gap may be a reflection of two factors that separate women from men in intercollegiate athletics: a) female student-athletes traditionally experience more academic success than males and b) women’s sports are not considered “legitimate sports.” Although most of the present literature focuses on male student-athletes, the literature discussed here is applicable to an examination of female student-athletes.

Expectations and Experiences

Although limited, the experiences of freshman student-athletes are given some particular attention in the literature. This attention does not revolve solely around women but it is still valid to the present study. Freshman student-athletes are viewed as different from non-student-athletes even though they face the same development issues (Walter and Smith 1989, Stone and Strange 1989). A major difference occurs with their participation in campus activities and the non-athlete culture.

Stone and Strange (1989) investigate the campus involvement of freshman student-athletes with a comparison to non-student-athletes. Student-athletes are simply not as
involved as other students since the time commitment to athletics is severely limiting. Stone and Strange (1989:152) suggest that adjusting to the increased academic standards of postsecondary education is difficult for any student but the additional time commitments of student-athletes makes it difficult for them to invest in out-of-class experiences. This suggests that due to their status as freshman, the female student-athletes in this study may experience a disconnect between their expectations of involvement and what actually manifests.

An inability to participate isolates freshman student-athletes from other students and makes establishing social relationships outside their athletic careers more difficult to establish (Walter and Smith 1989:329). If freshman female student-athletes are isolated from non-athletes, they may develop in-group boundaries that close out non-athletes. How the women handle potential isolation is an important aspect of the freshman transition. Even though athletic team membership provides opportunities for interaction, leadership, and developing skills, the literature clearly indicates that academic advisors should “encourage student-athletes to consider a variety of sources of campus involvement” and transfer “the personal planning skills gained in the context of their athletic career to other areas of their life” (Stone and Strange 1989:153).

The literature indicates that interaction is a key factor to personal growth during the freshman year. According to Kaufman and Creamer (1991:205), “the benefits of interaction with peers include both intellectual and personal gains.” Students need opportunities to gather in small groups to exchange ideas and opinions or to study and work together on projects. The extra commitments and strained schedules associated with participation in athletics limit these opportunities for freshman student-athletes. Students with strong social
goals but whose opportunities for involvement are restricted by limited exposure to campus, such as freshman student-athletes, need to be “encouraged to act on their desires for active involvement in student life” (Kaufman and Creamer 1991:206). Encouragement may be vital for the growth of female freshman student-athletes. Compared to men, women place more value on personal development and social goals causing them to “invest high quality of effort in relations with peers” (Kaufman and Creamer 1991:205). Not well integrated into campus life, student-athletes tend to form a separate subculture that adversely affects interpersonal involvement (Wolnick, et al 2001:621). Reversing this isolation requires student affairs strategies that integrate student-athletes more fully into the cultural and intellectual life of college (Ibid).

Pascarella, Edison, Serra Hagedorn, Nora, and Terenzini (1996) focus on the internal locus of attribution associated with the first year of college. A key finding from Pascarella et al (1996:750) is that “effective teaching practices...may not only positively influence student learning, but may also facilitate increased student internal locus of attribution for academic success.” Freshman female student-athletes who must miss class due to competition travel schedules would not experience the positive benefits of effective teaching practices of internal attribution.

Like Meyer, Petrie and Stoever (1997) examine academic and nonacademic predictors of academic performance. Although their study does not focus on freshman, their results offer some implications for freshmen. While SAT scores and hours taken account for 29% of the fall semester GPA variance, social support accounts for another 10% of the variance (Petrie and Stoever 1997:604). Higher social support at the beginning of the semester equaled higher academic performances (Petrie and Stoever 1997:604). However,
social support did not contribute to GPA variance of upper-level student-athletes. These results suggest that the freshman transition is important. Freshman female student-athletes need to develop and navigate social support networks in order to succeed in future years. Upon completion of the freshman year, social support does not impact the student athletes as much as they “are more experienced and better able to cope with the demands of being a college student” (Petrie and Stoever 1997:605).

Focusing on collegiate experiences, Lewis (1993) examines how student-athletes’ satisfaction levels impact their academic performance. Lewis focuses on the effects of student-athlete interactions with faculty and other students on their academic performance. Based on this literature, student-athletes, experiencing the freshman transition, who have less satisfactory interactions with other students and who place more emphasis on the athlete role are less likely than their counterparts to succeed academically (Lewis 1993:201). Lewis results suggest that freshman female student-athletes need to balance their athletic and academic identities.

Simons, Van Rheenen, and Covington (1999) argue that the athletic culture of student-athletes influences a diminished commitment to academics for the student-athlete. “The nature of intercollegiate athletics puts pressure on student-athletes to strengthen their athletic commitment at the expense of their academic commitment;” however, “female and non-revenue athletes seem more able to resist the athletic pressures and put the necessary time and energy to be successful academically” (Simons, Van Rheenen, and Covington 1999:158-159). The authors do not provide an explanation for why ‘female’ and ‘non-revenue’ sports possess these similarities. One explanation could be economic in that ‘female’ and ‘non-revenue’ athletes do not have the same potential as ‘revenue’ athletes to
generate athletic income. However, if the authors’ last statement is true, then the freshman transition may be the initial moment when female student-athletes resist such athletic pressures to succeed academically. How these succeed, or not, is essential to understanding the freshman transition.

During the freshman transition and in collegiate athletics overall, a student-athlete’s time is split between athletics and academics. Particularly in season, the pressures exerted on athletic time may outweigh that on academic time. When investigating the time effect Maloney and McCormick (1993:566) discover that the lower grades of revenue sports are attributed to an in-season time effect as grades improve during the off-season but not enough to recover. Non-revenue sports do not demonstrate a grade differential between the on and off seasons (Maloney and McCormick 1993:567). These perform at the same level as nonathletes. The authors do not provide an explanation for this result. The freshman female student-athletes in this current study are essentially non-revenue student-athletes and represent athletes both in and out of season.

Wolnick, Pierson, and Pascarella (2001) offer an interpretation different from the preceding concerning the effects of intercollegiate athletic participation for male student-athletes. Through an examination of learning orientations, Wolnick, et al (2001:619) found little evidence indicating that male revenue student-athletes “made net gains...that were any smaller than those of their male nonathlete counterparts.” In the literature, a similar finding is reported for women. The cognitive development of female student-athletes in their second and third year of school does not differ from the cognitive development of female nonathletes (Howard-Hamilton and Sina 2001:39).
Identity Formation

Issues of identity and student-athletes’ attitudes throughout the college experience occupy a prominent position in the literature assembled for this study. Student-athletes possess multiple identities as a student and an athlete. As freshmen, the women in my study are experiencing these identities in the collegiate arena for the first time. Understanding the impact collegiate athletics has on identity and attitude formation is vital to understanding the transition of female freshman student-athletes.

Meyer (1990) examines how female collegiate student-athletes identify and feel about their roles as student athletes. She considers how the athletic subculture contributes to their academic experiences. Meyer’s results indicate that the idealistic views of academic achievement held at the beginning of the student-athletes’ college careers were strengthened as they progressed. Freshman female student-athletes are at the beginning of their college careers. To confirm Meyer’s results, it is necessary to investigate how idealistic the views are of freshman female student-athletes.

As one of the formative studies informing the current study, Adler and Adler’s (1985:241) work represents “the first systematic participant-observation study of college athletes.” They extend previous studies by showing that student-athletes’ negative attitudes manifest throughout their college years, and structural conditions encountered by student-athletes impact their negative attitudes.

Adler and Adler (1985:241) suggest that many student-athletes “begin their college careers idealistically, caring about academics and intending to graduate.” The messages they receive from their coaches, their families, and society emphasize the importance of a college education. However, the student-athletes Adler and Adler (1985:243) studied “never really
considered what a college education entailed.” By the end of the freshman year, student-athletes’ idealism slips away. It becomes “replaced by disappointment and growing cynicism as [the student-athletes realize] how difficult it [is] to keep up with their schoolwork” (Adler and Adler 1985:244). Examining almost the entire first semester of the freshman year of female student-athletes allows the current study to capture the accuracy of Adler and Adler’s results.

Additionally, Adler and Adler’s (1985) work illustrates the importance of the freshman year in laying the foundation for subsequent years. They emphasize the firm grip athletics has over student-athletes’ self-identities. To enhance freshman female student-athletes’ acceptance of their academic role, following Adler and Adler’s (1985) arguments, they need to have greater investment in their academic decisions and greater interaction with their non-athletic peers.

Building on their previous work Adler and Adler (1988) examine the intense loyalty student-athletes develop for the athletic organization. Domination, subordination, and control are significant factors for enticing loyalty among student-athletes. These factors contribute to student-athletes’ identification with their sport (Ogilvie, Morgan, Pierce Marcotte, and Ryan 1981). By entering collegiate athletics, student-athletes’ selves are stripped down and rebuilt according to team and institutional norms (Adler and Adler 1988). Resocialization of student-athletes produces the integration and goal alignment necessary for the formation of group membership. Adler and Adler (1988) suggest that generating intense loyalty among student-athletes is necessary since they are recruited based on talent instead of other unifying factors. The result of this recruitment strategy is a need to subject student-athletes “to an intensive socialization experience so they may be shaped into the type of
individuals who behave appropriately off the court, project the optional team image to the media and public, and perform during games in a manner that facilitates the highly interdependent team play” (Adler and Adler 1988:314).


Cornelius’ study suggests a relationship between athletic pressure and student development. Student-athletes who traditionally perform poorly academically (i.e. revenue male student-athletes) are arguably under the most pressure to succeed due to the professionalization of college athletics and the allure of professional leagues. Female student-athletes may perform better as a group simply because they do not experience the same kind of pressure as revenue student-athletes, although further investigation is needed to support this argument.

Similar to academic performance, the pressures and time constraints associated with college athletics may contribute to increased stress among student-athletes. In fact, student-athletes tend to have a higher risk of psychological distress than the general student population (Ogilvie, et al 1981). Smallman, Sowa, and Young (1991) investigate ethnic and gender differences in student-athletes’ responses to stressful life events. Gender affects student-athletes responses to stress. Female student-athletes reported greater anxiety with the athletic realm (Smallman, et al 1991:234). This gender discrepancy may reflect gendered perceptions of faculty, students, and society. Female student-athletes “may receive more
support and reinforcement for their role as student” than their male peers (Ibid). During the freshman transition, it is important to assess the challenges female student-athletes face and the mechanisms they use to overcome them.

Not only must student-athletes learn to manage their own attitudes and sense of identity but, as the literature suggests, they must manage the attitudes of nonathletes (i.e. faculty and other students) as well. McHugh Engstrom, Sedlacek, and McEwen (1995) examine the differences in faculty attitudes toward male revenue and non-revenue student-athletes. Male revenue and non-revenue student-athletes experience negative feelings from faculty in the situations of “earning an A in a professor’s class” or “receiving a full scholarship” (McHuch Engstrom, et al 1995:222). Female faculty possessed “the strongest negative feelings toward the creation of [tutoring] services and scholarships for male non-revenue student-athletes (McHugh Engstrom, et al 1995:223). Faculty perceptions of female student-athletes are not assessed in the literature I investigated. Studying freshman female student-athletes will provide opportunities for such examinations.

McHugh Engstrom and Sedlacek (1991, 1993, and 1995) also investigate the stereotypical perceptions faculty and the general student body has of student-athletes. Their findings indicate that stereotypes exist about student-athletes. Interaction seems to be a practical strategy for eliminating stereotypes. Student-athletes need to form meaningful relationships with other students and with faculty (McHugh Engstrom and Sedlacek 1991, 1993; McHugh Engstrom, et al 1995). Students and faculty need to expand their understanding of student-athletes by realizing that special services such as tutoring for student-athletes complement the academic mission of an institution (McHugh Engstrom and Sedlacek 1995:225). Treating student-athletes as a culture group will allow universities to
include them in their diversity and cultural sensitivity training (Ibid). The freshman transition offers opportunities to examine how female student-athletes experience the perceptions of faculty and the non-student-athlete population.

Support Services

Freshman female student-athletes, because of their unique situation, are different from other freshman students. Walter and Smith (1989:338) contend that the differences stem from learning deficiencies at the point of entry. This statement, however, is not representative of all female and non-revenue student-athletes. Regardless of learning aptitude, student-athletes remain different nonetheless and need appropriate support services. Success during the freshman transition, I suggest as based on the literature, must come from athletic support services. To ensure athletic and academic success of freshmen student-athletes, athletic support services must help student-athletes manage their time, balance their academic and social lives, develop management strategies for their sexual lives, cope with the problems of drugs and alcohol, and deal with their heightened visibility (Walter and Smith 1989:338-339).

Due to their unique situation and the extensive demands on their time, student-athletes, as the literature suggests, need specific advising and counseling services. Carodine, Almond, and Gratto (2001:31) contend that the main goal of a support program for student-athletes should be to provide academic support, career counseling, and personal development.

Traditionally, athletic support services offer these services. Broughton and Neyer (2001:51) expand this model by adding that a program should include “trained personnel
who can assess and treat student-athletes’ academic, athletic, and personal needs.” Adding a psychologist trained in developmental, clinical, and performance-enhancing counseling to Carodine, et al’s (2001) model would create a more comprehensive program for athletic and academic advising and counseling. Freshman female student-athletes’ access to such resources may be limited given the resources of the university. How this affects the particular women in this study may not be ascertained.

Similarly, Hood, Craig, and Ferguson (1992) report that students’ participation in intercollegiate athletics is not detrimental to their academic achievement. This finding, however, only extends to freshmen. When matched with nonathletes of the same gender, ethnicity, and scholastic aptitude, revenue and non-revenue student-athletes earn grades similar to their nonathletic matches (Hood, et al 1992:452). This finding possibly suggests that “through the use of the various academic support and advising services available to them, athletes as a group are able, in spite of the large drain on their time and emerges to achieve academically as well as the nonathletes with whom they were matched” (Ibid). Such a finding would necessitate the maintenance of athletic support services to help student-athletes manage their academic and athletic participation.
Selecting a particular theoretical framework from which to organize research is, in my opinion, a highly subjective affair. Theory represents a means of exploration and interpretation of a given situation. It is also a means of exploitation of a situation. A given situation, I believe, can never be fully interpreted. You cannot reconstruct a situation; you can only model it. I mention this point simply to illustrate that theory selection is a biased act.

The issue of intercollegiate athletics and the role freshman female student athletes play as members and maintainers of the collegiate athletic system lends itself to a variety of inquiries and a multitude of theoretical perspectives. The theories I incorporate in this study reflect my personal bias and my research interests. Since my research questions focus on student-athlete identity, I utilize identity theory, social identity theory, and interactionism in this study. However, a Marxist approach, a functionalist approach, or elite theory could easily explain the freshman transition of female student-athletes. These alternative theories are just that – alternatives. While I could criticize their applications to the freshman transition, I could not criticize them as theoretical constructs. It is this notion of relativism that I ask the reader to incorporate while examining my theoretical framework.
Before I begin, however, I must first define the concept of identity from which I am working. The following definition stems from the work of an anthropologist who dared to claim rights as a sociologist:

Identity is always an unfinished project that allows individuals to act from a certain social position on the basis of claims as to who they are, who they relate to, the benefits of their position, and who they are perceived as. An individual always acts as someone, as a part of the social relations. (Natrajan 2004)

This definition reflects the negotiated nature of identity that I feel is fundamental to an adequate understanding of identity.

Theories of Identity

In the study of identity, two seemingly unrelated theories – due to their different disciplinary roots – sit at the top of a theoretical hierarchy. Identity theory (e.g. Burke 1980; Stryker 1968) and social identity theory (e.g. Tajfel 1982; Tajfel and Turner 1986) “address the social nature of self as constituted by society, and eschew perspectives that treat self as independent of and prior to society” (Hogg, Terry, and White 1995:255). Although both theories recognize a multifaceted self related to social structure, their differences boil down to an individual versus group perspective. “Identity theory is principally a microsociological theory that sets out to explain individuals’ role-related behaviors, while social identity theory is a social psychological theory that sets out to explain group processes and intergroup relations” (Ibid).

In application both identity theory and social identity theory offer greater understanding of the identity articulation of freshman female student-athletes. For purposes
of comparison, the following sections discuss the salience of both theories in the areas of bases of identity, activation of identity, and processes that arise from identity activation.

Identity Theory

Identity theory is primarily concerned with the categorization of self and others as occupants of specific roles in society. Stryker suggests that each role position occupied in society has a distinct role identity (as cited in Hogg et al 1995:256). Role identities incorporate the meanings and expectations associated with a specific role in society. Through a process of labeling or naming, role identities not only provide meaning for self and other in reference to concrete role specifications but in reference to counterroles as well (Ibid). For instance, by labeling themselves as student-athletes, freshman female student-athletes merge the meanings of roles they occupy such as student and athlete as well as between meanings of roles they do not occupy such as coach.

Within identity theory, role meanings are applied not through a functionalist perspective of internalized norms but through social interaction and reflexivity. Stets and Burke (2000:227) elaborate on the match that occurs between self and others in role interaction:

Roles imply action through negotiation.
Inherent to the functioning of a role is reciprocity and exchange relations with other roles (Ibid). Continuous negotiation occurs in the enactment of a role based on the feedback gained through self-evaluation. “The perception that one is enacting a role satisfactorily should enhance feelings of self-esteem, where as perceptions of poor role performance may engender doubts about one’s self-worth, and may even produce symptoms of psychological distress” (as cited in Hogg et al 1995:257). Negotiation maintains the match between the self and others’ identity standards.

Negotiated role identities could impact freshman female student-athletes in several ways. Others may assign role meanings to the student-athlete identity that do not take into account individual characteristics. For instance, the role of a student-athlete, as identified by the other, may be to value athletics over academics. Such a role identity could influence the academic support received by student-athletes as well as their motivation “to just stay eligible.” Correspondingly, gender may influence role identity as female student-athletes may be expected to excel in both the student and athlete roles while the role identity of male student-athletes may only emphasize athletics. Distress could occur if female student-athletes do not meet these role expectations.

Although an individual occupies multiple role identities, they are not activated haphazardly. Hogg, Terry, and White (1995:257) suggest a hierarchy of identities where those positioned at the top of a self-concept are more likely to be invoked in a particular situation than those positioned at the bottom. Identity salience refers to “the likelihood that [an] identity will be invoked in diverse situations” (Ibid). The affective outcomes of salient identities suggests that salient identities exert more influence than lower identities on a person’s sense of self-meaning and feeling of self-worth (as cited in Hogg et al 1995:258).
The hierarchical construct also suggests that two individuals could occupy the same role identity but behave differently due to varying levels of identity salience. Not only does identity salience have behavioral and affective outcomes but it “influences people’s relationships, particularly their perceptions and evaluations of others” (as cited in Hogg et al 1995:258).

For student-athletes, identity salience refers to the questions of “which is more important – to be a student or an athlete?” Recognizing a student-athlete’s identity hierarchy acknowledges that although student-athletes share the same role identity, the salience of that identity may vary from person to person. By understanding varying levels of salience, athletic and academic personnel can help student-athletes meet their own and the institution’s standards of success.

Tied in with identity salience is commitment. Commitment “reflects the extent to which important significant others are judged to want the person to occupy a particular role position” (Hogg et al 1995:258). Commitment to a particular role identity is high if important social relationships are predicated on occupancy of that role, and the vacancy of that role would mean a psychologically devastating loss of a social network (Ibid). High commitment to the student-athlete role would mean distress to the student-athlete if she were injured, lose eligibility, or exhaust eligibility. If lost, the social network produced by athletics would need to be replaced by something of equal value to eliminate distress and maintain high levels of self-worth.
Social Identity Theory

Instead of emphasizing the roles found in identity theory, social identity theory emphasizes the group and the categorization of self as in-group and out-group. Stets and Burke (2000:225) explain the role of the group in social identity:

...a social identity is a person’s knowledge that he or she belongs to a social category or group. A social group is a set of individuals who hold a common social identification or view themselves as members of the same social category. Through a social comparison process, persons who are similar to the self are categorized with the self and are labeled the in-group; persons who differ from the self are categorized as the out-group.

In the preceding definition, two fundamental processes of social identity are clearly delineated. Self-categorization provides a sense of who one is similar to based on social categories and establishes in-group/out-group boundaries. “The consequence of self-categorization is an accentuation of the perceived similarities between the self and other in-group members, and an accentuation of the perceived differences between the self and out-group members” (Stets and Burke 2000:225). Flowing from self-categorization, the social comparison process offers self-enhancement by favoring in-group norms and stereotypes. By evaluating the in-group and out-group such that the in-group is judged positively and the out-group is judged negatively, self-esteem is enhanced through in-group membership (Stets and Burke 2000:225; Hogg et al 1995:260).

For instance, to enhance self-esteem and establish group boundaries female student-athletes may solidify through increased involvement their positive associations with the student-athlete group by excluding the non-student-athlete group. The same process may occur for non-student-athletes identifying with the non-student-athlete group. Freshman
female student-athletes may experience the outcomes of self-categorization and social comparison for the first time in the context of collegiate athletics due to their freshman status.

While distinct, identity theory and social identity theory possess similarities that create a well-intertwined meta-theory for identity. Both theories recognize the influences of structure on identity formation. The socially constructed self mediates the relationship between social structure or society and individual social behavior (Hogg et al 1995:262). The processes for internalizing self in identity theory and social identity theory provide a starting point for interpreting identity formation.

**Interactionism (Symbolic Interactionism)**

Interactionism emphasizes the power of the actor in constructing reality. Stryker and Statham (1985:314) identify the theatrics behind interaction:

> From the standpoint of symbolic interactionism, the environment of human and interaction is necessarily a symbolically defined environment. Persons act with reference to one another in terms of the symbols developed through their interaction, and they act through the communication of these symbols. Society is a summary name for such interaction.

This definition illustrates the continuous recreation of society as individuals act in reference to one another. In this view, freshman female student-athletes negotiate their social reality through their interactions with others. They understand what it means to be a student-athlete through the perspectives of those with whom they interact.

To further understand the construction of reality during the freshman transition requires an examination of the role of the actor, the role freshman female student-athletes as well as the role of others. Barnes’ (1995) interactionism identifies the situational negotiation people undertake to create and recreate forms of order. For Barnes (1995:68) “cultural and
institutional order are not given patterns that enforce themselves upon people but are forms of order that emerge as people interact….” Viewed like this student-athletes are active participants.

Following Goffman’s tenets, Barnes outlines an interactionist characterization of “society.” For present purposes, intercollegiate athletics as well as the university in this study may be thought of as a “society” with its own realm of social interaction. The first of Goffman’s tenets characterizes “society” as a series of encounters “wherein two or more human beings come into proximity and act in ways that take account of each other” (Barnes 1995:69-70). These encounters, according to Goffman’s second tenet, are special and not purely instrumental (Barnes 1995:70). People are not objects; therefore, the interactions between people can be characterized by outcomes that are not purposeful (in an economic sense) such as outcomes of dominance and submission experienced by female student-athletes. Experiences of dominance and submission occur through female student-athletes’ perceptions of inequalities between them and male student-athletes.

Speaking to the “individual” of interactionist theories, Goffman’s third tenet identifies the non-independence of the individual (ibid). By maintaining that individuals are susceptible to each other in interaction, Barnes (ibid) clearly indicates the malleable nature of individuals. Depending on the inputs of others in a given interactional setting, an individual may or may not retain given wants, preferences, tastes, or inclinations in a given interactional setting. Such malleability contributes to the manifestation of identity among freshman female student-athletes by permitting multiple roles for a given identity.

In his fourth and final tenet, Goffman comments on the existence, or rather the non-existence, of fixed, internalized norms. Goffman contends that “the orderly features of
interaction can never be inferred wholly from pre-existing elements, whether of knowledge or competence, preference or desire, commitment or conviction” (Barnes 1995:71). The orderly features of interaction are a product of improvisation and negotiation between the actors. This framework gives power to the context of the situation in engendering the actors to act.

Goffman’s tenets express the general characteristics of interaction. As theoretical constructs they are neutral (i.e. they do not promote or diminish inequalities in a given situation). Their neutrality disappears in application. In a gendered organizations approach, Goffman’s tenets shed light on the maintenance of inequalities between women and men in athletics. However, they could easily act as mechanisms for change if the actors negotiated for change. To solve this paradox, Barnes (1995:71) identifies individual susceptibility and references Goffman’s face-maintenance.

Individuals are susceptible to the pressures and preferences of others in a given encounter. Freshman female student-athletes are susceptible to the pressures and preferences of their teammates and coaches. This susceptibility implies an interactional goal of compromise between actors. Compromise involves the process of keeping face. Barnes (1995:71) suggests that “participants in social interaction present themselves as following “lines,” and keep face to the extent that their lines are accepted and their performances in following them are recognized as adequate.” Monitoring the responses of others allows participants to gauge how well they are keeping face (ibid). Freshman female student-athletes may do this by determining what it means “to not let the team down.” While this suggests a participant’s need to be in alignment with the preferences of others, it also suggests the ability of participants to enforce their preferences on others through sanctioning.
and social pressure. The withdrawal or intensification of deference allows participants to produce and reproduce rules and norms through interaction itself (Barnes 1995).

Freshman female student-athletes may recognize socially constructed differential role expectations for female and male student-athletes. For example, female student-athletes may perceive that they are expected to focus more than male student-athletes on the student aspect of student-athlete and to participate in the community as an academic and athletic role model for youth. To keep face with these norms, female student-athletes, during the freshman transition, may alter normalized behavior to ensure they are following the appropriate lines. They may participate in activities they normally would avoid, such as extra academic preparation or community service projects, simply because the team expects it of them.

Complimenting Barnes’ interactionism, Snyder (1986) generalizes five main points in his presentation of symbolic interactionism. First, human communication depends on symbols in the forms of objects or behavior to transmit meanings to the group. The meanings are socially created and understood by the group. Second, meanings are successfully transmitted only when the receiver group has acquired the same set of meanings for a given symbol. The receivers understand the context of the transmitted meaning and can act accordingly. Third, meanings are fluid and can change overtime. Social interaction produces and alters meanings. Fourth, individuals define and organize meanings through a reflective process. Individuals organize their social world by reflecting on objects, others, and themselves. Since meanings are negotiated and open to interpretation, conflicting meanings can emerge. Fifth, self-reflection allows individuals to control their behavior and interact with others. This produces identities that are situational. Social interaction constructs, alters, and affirms individual identities.
Symbolic interactionism, as presented by Snyder (1986), applies to the female student athlete in the obvious ways. This individual must negotiate her identities as a female, a student, and an athlete. Every interpersonal and intrapersonal interaction either verifies or redefines her identity. Through the freshman transition, female student athletes experience the contextual construction, validation, and interplay of these identities for the first time. The manner by which they negotiate these identities will impact the maintenance of these identities as well as their careers as student athletes.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH PROCESS

The epistemology informing this study reflects a constructionist approach. In his discussion of various epistemologies, Crotty (1998:8) outlines several key characteristics of constructivism:

• There is no objective truth waiting for us to discover it.

• Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world.

• There is no meaning without a mind.

• Meaning is not discovered but constructed.

• Different people may construct meaning in different ways even in relation to the same phenomenon.

Constructionism permits an understanding that what is important in the research process is not the data, per se, but the role of the actor in constructing the realities contained in the data. The women in this study, as well as myself, apply meaning to the freshman transition based on our experiences and our Cultural framework. As a system, Culture implies practice as “the system has no existence apart from the succession of practices that instantiate, reproduce, or...transform it” (Sewell 1999:47). Meaning, thus, is negotiated.

The negotiated qualities of constructionism led me to select a qualitative research model as the best fit for an examination of the freshman transition of female student-athletes.
Qualitative researchers self-consciously draw upon their own experiences; think reflectively, historically, and biographically; and “seek strategies of empirical inquiry that will allow them to make connections among lived experience, larger social and cultural structures, and the here and now” (Denzin and Lincoln 1998:xi). Qualitative research focuses on people’s narratives. Through narratives gathered by interacting and talking with participants, researchers understand that “reality is socially constructed, complex, and ever changing” (Glesne 1999:5).

Life as well as research has a social mission. This mission is about empowering individuals to reflect on themselves and break down the barriers that exist between themselves and others. Feminist methodologies provide a means to accomplish this mission in qualitative research. Although feminist research can involve methods other than qualitative, several traditional feminist researchers argue that qualitative methods are more appropriate for feminist research on gender for three reasons: (Sprague and Zimmerman 1993:261)

1) The topic of gender introduces issues that are not easily quantifiable, like emotions and context-specific events.

2) Qualitative techniques allow the use of emotion and self-reflection as data.

3) Qualitative methods have more potential for correcting the “androcentric bias” embedded in traditional questions, concepts, and theories than do quantitative methods.

Feminist research emphasizes the social construction of worldviews and of the self. By exploring the narratives of the young women in this study, I acknowledge the negotiation that occurs in the construction of self and others. The self, according to Abu-Lughod
(1991:140), “is always a construction, never a natural or found entity, even if it has that appearance.” Therefore, the self as described by the women in this study must be recognized as a product of their context-specific experiences.

Additionally, feminist research emphasizes a commitment to empowering women. By empowering women through research, women are afforded the opportunity to have their experiences placed on the same level as those of men. This sectioning off of women’s experiences does conjure up the debate that studying women only provides a partial picture of the given inquiry (Abu-Lughod 1991). However, it is important to note that the exclusion of women provides an equally partial picture. What is needed is the recognition that all representations are “partial truths” (Abu-Lughod 1991:142).

Since my goal is to investigate the lives of young women and present their realities as valid, feminist methodologies make sense for me. I agree with Leslie Bloom’s (1998:151) perspective that “researching another woman’s life has the potential to be both an intellectual task and a journey through which researchers and respondents have potential for gaining critical self-understanding.”

**Research Questions**

This study focuses primarily on three research questions. Each elicits an examination of the identities, expectations, challenges, and strategies of female student-athletes experiencing the freshman transition at a mid-sized Midwestern university:

1) How do freshman female student-athletes at a mid-sized division I university in the Midwest feel about and evaluate their expectations and experiences during the freshman transition?
2) How do freshman female student-athletes personally experience academics and athletics in their daily lives?

3) How do the support services offered by the athletic department facilitate the transition to the collegiate experience of freshman female student-athletes?

Student-athletes are considered a special population on a college campus. The Registrar’s office at this university even uses this terminology when coding student-athletes for record keeping purposes. Although numerous studies have focused on student-athletes, a majority of these studies address male student-athletes and few specifically examine issues concerning freshmen. Other studies have focused on the freshman experience of students in general. No study I found combined the parameters of freshman, female, and student-athlete.

In light of this gap in the literature, I wanted to look at the transition experienced by freshman female student-athletes and give recognition to this group as a worthy research focus.

Sample

The process of identifying participants for this study involved three limiting factors. The participants must be: 1) freshman, 2) female, and 3) a student-athlete. Beside the factors of freshman and female, I was not concerned with a specific type of student-athlete (i.e. types based on race, class, revenue vs. non-revenue sport, or scholarship vs. non-scholarship).

There are several reasons for this. First, women, particularly at the Division I level, seem lost in the literature with most of the research attention given to male student-athletes’ academic success or male student (-athlete) development.
While I acknowledge that many relevant studies exist about the identity and role establishment of women based on race and class in arenas other than athletics (see Ely 1995 and Luttrell 1989), these factors did not fit the scope of this study. Second, the athletic department from which I drew my participants does not code their prospects for race or class. Therefore, I had no way of knowing these characteristics until my participants were fully admitted and arrived on campus.

Third, I simply wanted to focus this study on gender. Fourth and finally, the transition experienced by true freshman is quite different from the transition of redshirt freshman and junior college transfers. I only included true freshman as redshirt freshman and junior college transfers have already experienced the initial transition of college life.

Accessing the student-athletes was largely a non-issue for me. As a graduate assistant for Student Athlete Services for the university involved in this study, I had rapport with the athletic department. They approved my use of student-athletes early on in the construction of this study and assisted in identifying potential participants. Due to my position with football, I had very limited contact with women’s sports and needed such assistance.

To obtain voluntary participants I utilized the prospects sheet created by the compliance department within the athletic department to identify new student-athletes who committed for the Fall 2004 semester. Since the prospects sheet is in flux until June, I did not begin my search until mid-June when most of the incoming student-athletes had been identified. This list indicated that 55 prospects met my criteria of female and freshman. I sent a letter of explanation as well as an informed consent form to each prospect and asked each to return the consent form to me by August 1, 2004 if they wished to participate (see Appendix A).
As of August 1st, eight prospects returned consent forms to me. Entering into this study I envisioned a sample size of 10-15 participants with all nine women’s sports at this university represented. To increase my sample size from eight I contacted the Student Athlete Counselor who deals primarily with the women’s sports not yet represented in my study. He recommended a few individuals. After meeting with the individuals, I then used a snowball sampling technique by which these student-athletes recommended other student-athletes, usually teammates or roommates. Snowball sampling is useful when you have no other way to contact participants but, as Glesne (1999:29) points out, it is not always a sufficient strategy in itself.

The combination of sampling techniques I incorporated yielded a sample size of 13 by the end of the first week of classes for the Fall 2004 semester. My final sample, though, consisted of 12 student-athletes as one woman withdrew prior to the first round of interviews. While not representing all nine women’s sports this study does include representatives from Women’s Track (1), Women’s Swimming & Diving (2), Women’s Tennis (2), Women’s Basketball (2), Softball (2), and Women’s Volleyball (3). This sample has one self-reported racial minority and a healthy mix of nine scholarship and three non-scholarship student-athletes.

Data Gathering

For this study, the process of data gathering incorporated not only the methods of interviewing and journaling but a specific timeframe as well. Utilizing a time frame allowed me to maintain consistency in the amount of experiences from which each participant could
draw. My specific timeframe divided the semester into three sections: beginning, middle, and end.

Since I wanted to examine each of my participants' initial perceptions and expectations of their positions as student-athletes with minimal influenced from the habituation of collegiate athletic life, I selected and completed the pre-interviews within the first month of the Fall 2004 semester. Similarly, the post interviews were scheduled and completed within the final two weeks of the Fall 2004 semester to ensure that my participants could reflect on the almost entire semester. I selected the journaling activity for the midpoint (7th and 8th weeks) of the semester to more or less evenly disperse my contact with my participants. By contacting them at the midpoint, I hopefully kept my participants involved in the process of reflection and aware of themselves as student-athletes.

To develop the semi-structured interview questions for the pre and post interviews, I used two different structuring methods. The pre-interview questions laid the foundation for the post interview questions and the journaling activity (see Appendix B). For each pre-interview question, I identified goals that primarily revolved around identity and role establishment, semester expectations, and gender issues. I had these interviews transcribed once they were completed so I could analyze them to help me develop themes for the post interview. Structured differently than the pre-interview questions, the post interview questions are organized around the following themes: 1) revisiting pre-interview questions; 2) issues affecting student-athletes; 3) motivations, pressures, rigors; 4) integration into collegiate life; 5) coping skills; 6) NCAA and institutional regulations and support; 7) final thoughts on the freshman transition, and 8) reflection.
The journaling activity at the midpoint of the semester accomplished two goals. First, it provided a different medium for the women to express themselves as I emailed my questions to them and had them reply back with their responses. The four questions in this short activity addressed the challenges they faced through the midpoint of the semester and how they managed those challenges. The second accomplishment of the journaling activity was to maintain contact with my participants and keep them mentally involved in the study.

While the journaling activity was completed at a location selected by each participant and unknown to me, each interview was conducted at a quiet study facility on campus. The interviews were tape-recorded with the respondents’ permission and transcribed shortly after completion. The pre-interviews lasted an average of 30 minutes while the post interviews lasted an average of 60 minutes.

I had each interview transcribed by a local transcriptionist not involved with this project or the participants. I printed a copy of each transcript and kept a paper file of notes and transcripts. After compiling the transcripts and journals, I coded the data according to established coding techniques.

Analysis

Numerous coding paradigms exist for qualitative data. After a review of several researchers’ paradigms (e.g. Auerbach and Silverstein (2003), Strauss (1987), Bernard (1994), and Glesne (1999)), I selected Strauss’ paradigm for coding each set of data gathered for this study. While thorough, Strauss’ techniques are less time consuming than the other paradigms. The following discussion offers a detailed explanation of Strauss’ paradigm.
Strauss (1987), in his discussion of qualitative analysis, elaborates on data coding as an essential part of the basic research process. The methodologies employed by Strauss (1987:22) are rooted in grounded theory as they emphasize the generation of theory and the data in which the theory is grounded. Grounded theory mandates that data are systematically and intensively analyzed, thus producing well-constructed theory. In his presentation, Strauss (1987) identifies three types of coding procedures (open, axial, and selective) for use with the coding paradigm. The following coding paradigm functions, for Strauss (1987:27), as a reminder to code data for relevance to whatever phenomena are referenced by a given category:

- Conditions
- Interaction among the actors
- Strategies and tactics
- Consequences

Without the inclusion of these paradigm items in the analysis process, coding is not coding (Strauss 1987:28).

The first and initial type of coding identified by Strauss (1987) is open coding. This is unrestricted coding done by scrutinizing a document (i.e. fieldnotes, interview, etc.) line-by-line and word-by-word. The point of this coding is to open up the inquiry to all possible interpretations. Since open coding reflects a microscopic approach many interpretations will emerge; however, any wrong interpretations will eventually be cancelled out through later steps of the inquiry (Strauss 1987:29). The interpretations made should be grounded in the data on the page as well as in the technical literature brought to the inquiry (Ibid).
Although open coding yields numerous codes, many of them will be provisional and will require modification. Strauss (1987:32) warns that the researcher must not become too committed to the first codes from open coding since they “can seem highly relevant when they are not.” However, open coding is essential as it leads to Strauss’ next two stages of coding.

Axial coding, an extension of open coding, is Strauss’ second type of coding. “It consists of intense analysis done around one category at a time in terms of the paradigm items (conditions, consequences, and so forth)” (Strauss 1987:32). Relationships between categories become increasingly more prominent in this stage. During the coding process, axial coding can alternate with looser kinds of open coding (Ibid). As a transition device, axial coding assists the researcher in committing to a core category or categories that will take the researcher into selective coding (Ibid).

The third type of coding, selective coding, was not used in the analysis. The coding procedures used for this study (open and axial coding) provided an adequate means to interpret the data gathered. Once generated, the interpretations led to the development of a theoretical narrative about the freshman transition of female student-athletes.

**Ensuring Confidentiality**

I considered several issues in order to ensure confidentiality and comply with this institution’s Human Subjects Review Board. Each student-athlete signed a voluntary consent form prior to the initiation of any data gathering activities. I verbally made sure that each woman understood the nature of this project and the part they would play prior to scheduling the pre-interview. To maintain anonymity of participants I took extra care to eliminate any
identifying markers such as sport, hometown, and name. I employed pseudonyms as identifiers. Following feminist methodologies, I asked each woman to select their own pseudonym (Bloom 1998). Most of the women enjoyed this opportunity. Selecting their own pseudonyms gave these women some control over how they would be presented.

Once I received the transcripts from my transcriptionist, I instructed her to destroy her saved data. Cassette tapes, transcripts, written notes, and disks were kept in a secure location at my home. I destroyed the materials after depleting their usefulness.

**Ethical Considerations**

Since the student-athletes would potentially be sharing sensitive information about themselves and the individuals with whom they interact, I wanted to create an atmosphere of comfort and respect for my interviews. To achieve this I focused on two areas: environment and rapport. My construction of both followed feminist methodologies as I paid particular attention to power dynamics and sought to reduce any inequalities. (Abu-Lughod 1991)

The locations selected for each interview represent second and third choices. Ideally, I would have conducted these interviews in the comfort of the student-athletes' or my home. However, such a location would have violated NCAA and institutional rules as an appropriate area for interaction with student-athletes. In light of this, I selected locations (on-campus study facilities that could be reserved for privacy) that were, in my opinion, warm and inviting as opposed to cold and sterile. When asked about the interview locations, several of the women in this study reported that the locations were “comfortable” and “familiar.”
Similar to my treatment of environment, I considered the amount of rapport necessary for a successful and fulfilling study. In feminist research, “the research relationship depends on a deep rapport with respondents” (Bloom 1998:150). Bloom (1998) indicates some of the concerns many feminist researchers have about the assumptions of inherent closeness and identification between women. She suggests that “although these theorists remain committed to the goal of attempting to achieve trusting and caring relationships in the field, they are wary of over-romanticizing feminist research” (Bloom 1998:151).

Reflecting on my interactions with the women, I feel I did not surpass Pamela Cotterill’s “friendly stranger” continuum where in the research relationship exists for the purpose of the research and is terminated when the interviews end (Bloom 1998:152). To build rapport I made connections with the women on a personal level, attended the sporting events of those in season, and offered athletic and academic encouragement via email or in person when I would run into them at study tables. My efforts to maintain rapport allowed me to stay connected to the women in between the pre and post interviews.

Without a concerted effort to create a comfortable environment and build rapport, the responses offered by the women may not have been as open or thorough. Additionally, I, as the researcher, would not have personally taken away as much as I did from the research process.

**Introducing the Women**

To familiarize the reader with the freshman women involved in this study I will provide a brief introduction to each woman (see Appendix C). This introduction includes each woman’s demographics, family background, educational specifics, and reason for
attending this university. To conceal the identities of the women, I have chosen not to indicate their sports.

*Katy* is a 19-year-old, Caucasian student-athlete from the upper Midwest. She grew up in a two parent middle class family with three older brothers. Her high school graduation class consisted of ~300 students. Katy is a psychology major on full athletic scholarship. She selected this university due to the strength of her sport’s program as well as the coaches involved. Also, this university is located in the “right size of town.”

*Sadie* is an 18-year-old, Caucasian student-athlete who is receiving no athletic scholarship. She is from a middle class family in the Midwest. Sadie’s parents are married and she has one older brother and 2 younger sisters. Her high school graduation class consisted of ~80 students. As an elementary education major, Sadie selected this university to continue playing her sport and to receive a quality education.

*Kala* is a 19-year-old, Caucasian student-athlete from the Midwest. She grew up in a middle class family with married parents, one older sister, and one older brother. Compared to all the women, Kala graduated with the smallest class size of 21. As a business major, she picked this university solely due to her sport. Kala is on full athletic scholarship.

*Dawn* is a 19-year-old, Caucasian student-athlete from the Midwest. She grew up in a middle class family but notes that it was in an agricultural setting. Her parents are married. Dawn is the youngest of five children with three older sisters and one older brother. Her graduation class consisted of ~230 students. Dawn currently does not receive an athletic scholarship. However, her coaches promised her a full scholarship for her sophomore year. She selected this university because she “loved the campus” and wanted an opportunity to pursue her sport. Dawn is a health and fitness management major.
Becky is an 18-year-old, African American student-athlete. She grew up in a working class family in the South. Although her mother is deceased, her father is married. Becky’s siblings consist of one older sister and one younger sister. As one of 68 students, Becky graduated from a small high school not in her school district. Majoring in pre-business, Becky is on full athletic scholarship. Becky cited the good academic reputation of this university as one of the reasons she selected it. Also, this university is not in her home state, which was important for Becky.

Claire is a 19-year-old, Caucasian student-athlete from the Midwest. With married parents, Claire grew up in a large, middle class family. She has 2 older brothers and 3 older sisters. Her graduation class consisted of ~539 students. Claire is receiving a full athletic scholarship and is majoring in psychology. When asked why she selected this university, Claire simply responded with “it seemed to fit.”

Olivia is an 18-year-old, Caucasian student-athlete from the Midwest. She hails from an upper-middle class family. Her parents are “still together” and she has one younger sister. Olivia graduated with a high school class of ~400 students. On a full athletic scholarship, she is majoring in special education. Olivia picked this university as she has had “an interest in it since second grade.”

Jenny is an 18-year-old, Caucasian student-athlete from the Midwest. She grew up in an upper-middle class family with married parents. Jenny is the middle child with one older brother and one younger brother. Her high school graduation class consisted of ~900 students. While majoring in marketing, she is only receiving a partial athletic scholarship. Jenny selected this university as an opportunity to pursue her sport.
Keegan is an 18-year-old, Caucasian student-athlete from the Midwest. Her middle class family is composed of “happily married” parents and one younger sister. She graduated with a class of ~650 students. Majoring in elementary education, Keegan is currently not receiving an athletic scholarship. Keegan’s main reason for selecting this university revolved around a family history of attending this university. She is not the first in her family to attend this university as a student-athlete. Her grandfather also was a student-athlete at this university.

Sarah is an 18-year-old, Caucasian student-athlete from the Midwest. She grew up the oldest of three (one younger brother and one younger sister) in a middle class family. Her parents are married. Sarah graduated with a high school class of ~450 students. She is a health and human performance major on full athletic scholarship. Sarah’s selection of this university involved three criteria: she liked the location, she could play her sport, and she enjoyed the school.

Morgan is a 19-year-old, Caucasian student-athlete from the Midwest. She grew up in a middle class family with two older brothers and eight stepbrothers and sisters. Both of her parents are divorced and remarried. Morgan’s high school graduation class consisted of ~368 students. With a partial athletic scholarship, Morgan is working on a pre-physical therapy degree. She picked this university for two reasons. First, it has a well-known science program. Second, she wanted to pursue her sport.

Allison is a 19-year-old, Caucasian student-athlete from the upper Midwest. Her middle class family consists of married parents, one older sister, and one younger brother. Allison graduated with a high school class of ~900. She is a pre-medicine major who
currently receives a partial athletic scholarship. Allison selected this university not only for the opportunity to pursue her sport but for the academics, size, and location of this university.
This chapter presents the major findings concerning the freshman transition as uncovered through this study. The findings address and are organized by the research questions elaborated on in chapter one. As a refresher, the three research questions are:

1) How do freshman female student-athletes at a mid-sized division I university in the Midwest feel about and evaluate their academic, athletic, and social expectations and experiences during the freshman transition?

2) How do freshman female student-athletes personally experience academics and athletics in their daily lives?

3) How do the support services offered by the athletic department facilitate the transition to the collegiate experience of freshman female student-athletes?

The following findings provide a glimpse into the lives of the women involved in this study at a given point in time. Although my intent was to illustrate the freshman transition as experienced by female student-athletes since their experiences are underrepresented in the literature, I do offer a few insights for the problems these women encountered. However, most of my insights will be addressed in the final chapter on research for the future.
expectations and experiences

All of the women in this study began their freshman year quite idealistic about their future experiences as student-athletes. Their positive anticipations focused on competing at the Division I level, having prestige as a student-athlete, maintaining the family atmosphere within the team, being involved in campus life, and starting the process of earning a respectable degree. Throughout the pre-interviews, 100% of the 12 women repeated, almost verbatim, these five expectations as essential to the student-athlete experience during the freshman transition.

Emphasizing the family atmosphere, Allison stated:

Um, it’s kind of a whole bunch of mixed feelings I guess I mean um, you feel kinda special cuz you get to wear all the team stuff, you’re part of a team. I think like as an incoming freshman the best thing was just that I had older girls that I had met at the start that, on the team, and they look out for you and you know they drive you to the grocery store if you need something...the transition from home to college life is pretty challenging and so when you have like a whole group of people that your automatically belong with that really helps...It also helps cuz a lot of the girls have been through the classes that you’ve been through so they can give you tips and like “oh I had this professor, he likes this” or you know things like that so because you’re an athlete you kinda get help as a student as well.

“Getting help” as a student-athlete comprises one of the prestige benefits these women were eager to take advantage of during their first semester. Academic aid as well as other support services allows female student-athletes to meet their role expectations of transitioning well to college and creating a positive network with other student-athletes and athletic department staff. Sarah discussed these benefits as:

Being able to get tutors for free, help with that, help with study just because also you miss some school while you’re on the road, uh traveling to things...Also you get sports passes to all other athletic events, so you can give support to other student-athletes which is pretty darn cool. To get support from other groups is fun, and study table, just like a quiet environment, you get to use the computers and printers and are able to get work done...student athlete advisors...kind of make sure that the transition
from high school to college is going okay and make sure your classes are doing well
and that if you need help then they’ll help you decide your major and stuff like that.

The general expectations expressed by all 12 of my participants were negotiated prior
to their arrival on campus as well as during the first few weeks of the semester. Through past
experiences and situational interaction, the women established their understanding of
student-athlete role identities.

When asked about specific individual expectations, the women again stressed very
similar elements. Most of their responses reflect a notion that the freshman transition caused
them to self-categorize and reestablish in-group and out-group boundaries. Although I asked
for individual expectations, the group was prevalent in their responses. Instead of expressing
personal achievement in academic goals, the goals were “to not let down the team” or “to
maintain the team GPA.” Helping her team reclaim the team GPA award for all sports was
particularly important to Jenny. Historically, her team maintained the highest cumulative
GPA. However, this past year they lost the award to women’s basketball. Even though
Jenny was only a freshman, she believed that she had a responsibility to uphold this tradition.

Team expectations, for obvious reasons, possessed a group component. However,
this component moved beyond competitive success. Claire, Katy, Olivia, Allison, and Dawn
mentioned family and support system when talking about the team. Kala, Jenny, Sadie,
Sarah, Becky, and Keegan wanted to “gel as a team,” “communicate as a team,” and find
ways to “figure each other out.” Interestingly, Morgan did not express specific team
expectations. She only wanted to take advantage of her athletic opportunities. I mention this
point because Morgan is also the one student-athlete who does not participate in as team-
orientated a sport as the other student-athletes. This illustrates that the expectations of
freshman female student-athletes are not internalized norms but are socially constructed through previous experiences.

Across the board, social expectations meant being involved in all aspects of collegiate life. The women yearned to participate not only in athletic department events but in collegiate organizations and events as well. Also, 12 out of the 12 participants indicated a desire to make new friends and to get to know students who were not student-athletes. Even though the women had a definite understanding of who is a student-athlete and who is not a student-athlete, they did not want to be isolated. Becky explained the importance of having a social life by saying that if you do not have a social life, then you are “just kinda off” and not fully developed. She goes on to mention:

...if you are working so hard here on your academics and getting a career started, if you’re not social then you...it goes hand-in-hand. I think you must be social to be successful.

In light of their social expectations, the women also had specific expectations of this university. They all indicated they were attending college to earn a degree. The women expected this university to provide them with “skills for the real world.” Claire summed this up well by stating:

...I want that [university] stamp to be something that I’m proud of and something that whoever my employer will be will be impressed with...

If and how these expectations were met during the freshman transition reflected one of the themes of the post-interview. One word defines the greatest influence on the outcomes of the women’s expectations, “busy.” Each woman was aware that being a collegiate student-athlete would be time consuming. Unfortunately, the post-interviews indicate that
the time consuming nature of collegiate athletics had to be experienced to be fully appreciated.

Balancing academics, athletics, and social activities required all of the women to make adjustments throughout their first semester. Some made these adjustments more gracefully than others but the necessary adjustments were made by all.

Most of the adjustments occurred with academic expectations and social expectations. Ten out of the 12 women expressed difficulty determining the amount of adequate studying time, and how to fit that time in with class, practice, and traveling. Kala discussed this from a fall sport perspective:

...I expected to miss a lot of class you know, being a fall sport but I mean I didn’t know how important it was...Sociology...class is pretty much based on all lectures so it was really hard to do that...from a studying standpoint yeah I do have to study a lot more. In high school it came a little more natural...

For a couple of the women, adjustments did not occur until well into the semester. Once adjustments were made, they experienced success. Sadie shared that:

...actually I was really struggling earlier in the semester and now I’m starting to realize what I need to do, how I need to study...I kinda dug myself a hole and now I have to get out of it so I got my grades back up but not where I wanted them to be. They’re not bad but they’re not good.

Similarly, Keegan expressed her ability to handle her academic challenges:

...few times throughout the semester I was struggling but once I figured out why I was struggling I fixed it and I like, I stayed more focused toward these subjects that I was falling behind in.

Allison was the most successful in achieving her initial academic expectations. For her, the adjustments were smooth and attainable:

Actually worked out pretty well. I do have all A’s so far and going into my finals I’m pretty comfortable where I don’t need to get 100% to keep an A. You know I could probably get a B on the final and still get an A in the class, so I think that part went
pretty well. It was very tough at times to just sit there and be like I have to study now, this is time to do my homework...there was a much higher level of work involved than in high school and everything, so overall it was tough to adjust but I think I met that expectation.

Meeting social expectations did not pan out as well as meeting academic expectations for several women. Time constraints greatly impacted the amount of time they could spend with non-student-athletes. Initially, the women wanted to experience non-athletic activities such as clubs or other social events. During the freshman transition, these women realized that athletic requirements such as practice, meals, study tables, and dorm floors primarily for athletes limited their involvement with non-student-athletes. Sarah mentioned:

Well I mean like when I first came here I was like yeah, I want to get involved, and I think if I did have more time I’d maybe pursue more...

The idealistic notion that “I would be involved in everything” quickly gave way to an identity that focused on athletics. Two of the women surrounded themselves with their teammates and other athletes.

Sadie -- I’m not really that social, only with my team really. Like, I guess those are pretty much my friends. I hang out with them.

Morgan -- ...I hang out with a lot of people on my floor (student-athletes) and a lot of athletes that I’ve met through classes and stuff.

Katy mentioned hanging out with others but her focus was student-athletes:

...I met people here and there who weren’t in sports uh, I rarely hang out with them outside of class or outside of the dorm area...right now I’m in basketball mode, that’s all I really need.

Five of the women interacted with non-student-athletes on a regular basis but realized the student-athlete role limited this interaction. Olivia shared:

I think that worked out well. I have like a small group of people that I kind of run around with, some of them are team members and I have made two friends...that aren’t...A lot of the rest of my friends are athletes just because that’s who you’re
around all the time but I don’t strictly limit myself to only being friends with athletes. I really don’t believe in that because I like to escape. We don’t have to talk about sports.

Kala expressed a desire to meet more people and hoped this could be accomplished in the off-season:

It was tough, we were gone a lot...I mean we met a lot of people but just not sat down and got to know them. We just kind of ran out of time. We have to be there. We have to be there so I’m hoping to meet more people in the spring.

Interestingly, in this study, one’s level of involvement with non-student-athletes may be related to scholarship status. Two of the non-scholarship student-athletes discussed the conscious choice to interact with various people, regardless of athletic status.

Keegan - - I’ve actually become more outgoing. Like I’m not afraid to just like go up to people and be like hey what’s up? I’ll say hi to people as they walk past on campus or if I see them down, if I’ve seen them before or whatever I’ll just smile and say hey...

Dawn -- Well in high school I didn’t really talk to people. If they were my close friends I did and I would only talk to them out of school. I did not talk in class or anything...I’m very talkative. If they ask anyone they’ll be like oh, that’s Dawn, I know her...I know ten times more people than [the other freshman on my team] just because I take the time to get to know people and I’m not going to blow them off.

Although my sample size is small, assessing interaction levels based on scholarship status should be pursued in future research. This may have implications for identity formation. Non-scholarship student-athletes may not possess as rigidly defined in-group boundaries as scholarship student-athletes.

Missing from the previous discussion on expectations and experiences is a gender component. Several questions in the pre and post interviews investigated what it meant for these women to be female student-athletes. While I anticipated a discussion of gender inequalities and role standards based on gender, the results were quite mixed.
During the pre-interview, I addressed the role of a female student-athlete and if it was different for the role of a male student-athlete. Five or the 12 women (Katy, Claire, Morgan, Becky, and Sarah) did not perceive or expect any differences. For Claire, “an athlete’s an athlete overall.” Morgan stated:

I don’t think so, no. Just because…a male and a female are both doing the same thing. They’re both playing sports and going to school. I don’t think there is a difference. They’re both just trying to make [this university] seem like a better place.

Seven of the 12 women (Keegan, Kala, Dawn, Olivia, Sadie, Jenny, and Allison) recognized differences between women and men to various degrees. Many of the statements of inequality revolved around “male student-athletes get more things,” “the guys have it easier,” “these guys have a built in excuse,” “males are not expected to succeed in the classroom,” and “women are expected to be a student and an athlete.”

Respect for women’s sports was one topic the women struggled with. Keegan, Allison, and Olivia expressed a concern that society, in general, does not value women’s sports. Allison mentioned more recognition for males:

...I don’t know, it’s kind of a little bit more difficult I think than being a male at times just because you know football and basketball, those are the big revenue sports and everyone’s like, notices them and goes to their games...I think being a female athlete, I don’t know, I really don’t know how to describe it...

Keegan felt a need to move beyond society’s low expectations:

I think so yes just cuz there’s more expected out of you than if there’s a male. Like you come into college and you think football, the guys are going to be dominant at it but what if you’re...a girl’s sport or something...I feel like you have to like live up to that. You have to live past that expectation and prove to them that it’s really worth a chance or something.
Olivia seemed to have internalized the discrepancies between women and men more than the other women in this study. She mentioned that the situation is improving for women but not as quickly as it should:

I’m a very opinionated person and I disagree with a lot of the places that the money goes to...it’s definitely on the rise but it’s still not where it should be I mean women aren’t recognized in the athletic sense as much as guys are and football, especially around here, it’s a huge full day deal for one football game...we can’t get close to a full house. I mean I know [our arena’s] big but you can’t get the full front part packed and I don’t know why that is. We’re just not like a revenue sport. I mean this year is going to be so much better from what I understand but I definitely think it’s on the rise but I don’t know if it’ll ever be to where it deserves to be because people don’t realize that the same hard work goes in as much as boys...

Kala emphasized academic discrepancies. She made it clear that she is here to earn a degree and she does not think that is a concern of male student-athletes:

…I guess the way I see it is males care way more about the sport than females. Like for myself, like yeah, I love [my sport] and stuff but I mean I’m also here to get a degree...and do well in the education part of it...males I think sometimes just, I don’t want to say “don’t try” but there are some who are here for instance to play football.

Differences in moral and ethical standards between female student-athletes and male student-athletes plagued the thoughts of Dawn and Olivia. For them, the perception is that men are not held to as high an ethical standard as women. Women are deeper in the “fishbowl” than men.

Dawn -- …I don’t think males are focused on as much either because in our society it’s easier for males to get by with stuff...when I was younger and in classes the girl would do something and the guy would do something and the girl would get in trouble.

Olivia -- …I think that it is easier to be a male athlete because there’s already an excuse. There’s always a way to get out of what you just did to mess up and you’re still a good role model. Women I think get the wrong end of the deal...if we mess up, everyone knows about it and there’s no one trying to protect us so you have to obey stricter standards...I think the female athletes that I’ve met and personally choose to surround myself have very high standards and morals and values...that’s because we know that we have to because that’s more important to us than other things.
The last set of comments caused me to think about a socially constructed reality. From my experiences with an athletic department and student-athlete affairs, athletic department staff at this university do not usually address the “fishbowl phenomenon” with female student-athletes. Male student-athletes are constantly told “to watch how they act” because the community magnifies the actions of student-athletes. Female student-athletes are expected to behave. They have evidently constructed this reality through experiences outside of the athletic department and the freshman transition.

Experiencing Athletics and Academics in Their Daily Lives

During the freshman transition, these women have awakened everyday with the realization that they are student-athletes. As freshman, these women are experiencing the pressures of collegiate athletics and finding coping mechanisms for the first time. How they handle the pressures of being a student-athlete is fundamental to understanding how these women succeed in the freshman transition.

When asked in the post-interview about their motivation to “stick it out” through the freshman transition, none of the freshman female student-athletes described being overwhelmed to the point of terminating their athletic or academic commitments to this university. These women strongly identified with being an athlete. Their “love of sport” and “not letting the team down” were the most common responses to motivation questions.

Eight of the 12 women discussed some aspect of their sport as their greatest motivator. For Becky, Keegan, Jenny, and Olivia being able to participate as an athlete kept them going throughout the semester. Athletics gave them an identity. Keegan shared:
...I've grown up around [my sport]...I've been around it since I was two. I've played it since I was five...it's like in my blood, like I have to have something [related to my sport]. I sleep with a [piece of equipment] next to my bed. I'm so like weird about it. I just have to have something [related to my sport] around me at all times.

Becky and Olivia extend this further by discussing how essential the athletic schedule is to giving them direction during the day. Olivia stated:

I really love [my sport] and I love being in shape and I love being active. My life would not be the same if I was not active and I was not involved in something that gave me an exact schedule everyday. Like right now we're not in season. Tuesday and Thursday we have off and I'm like lost. I sit in my dorm room sometimes and I'm like "uh...what do I do now, how about now"...

Similarly, Becky stated:

...I enjoy knowing what my day will be like, knowing that my day has already been planned for me...I'm on this cycle where I know okay I have practice at 3:00. I have to do this and this and this before practice. It keeps me straight and organized at the same time. So, without that I'm lost. Like on my day off I have nothing to do. I don't know what to do cuz they never tell me...

Additionally, athletics allowed Kala, Dawn, Sarah, and Morgan to fulfill their competitive needs. Being able to compete, improve themselves competitively, and win gave them a sense of success. Morgan believes that the feeling of winning through athletics “can't really [be] experience[d] any other way.”

A more specific element of their sport, their team, was the motivator mentioned by Allison and Katy. These two individuals placed the team before themselves. They kept going throughout the freshman transition, as they did not want to let down the team. Allison mentioned:

...you also have people who believe in you too...it’s not just you for yourself...you are part of a team so your team believes in you and you want to do it for the team. You know people are counting on you. Dig a little deeper. It’s not just like for you, like whatever I do is ok for me. No it’s the team and that keeps me going too.
The conversations I had with these women about motivation struck me since 10 of 12 identified so strongly with the athlete role. These women are just one injury away from never competing in their sport again. Also, in four years their collegiate athletic experiences will be completed due to exhausted eligibility. While a professional career as an athlete is possible, it is highly unlikely based on percentages. From this study, it seems evident that these women, as freshmen, have not given much thought to non-athletic careers, even though they all want “to earn a respectable degree” from this university. When specifically asked how they would respond if they could not compete in their sport anymore, all of the women mentioned that they would “find a way to be involved in athletics.”

The freshman transition involves new experiences and unfamiliar experiences. Accompanying these types of experiences is a need to establish coping skills. I have already mentioned how these women handled the rigors of collegiate academics. Another area that necessitates coping skills is conflict.

Overall, conflict was at a minimum for these female student-athletes. None of the women reported any conflict between themselves and the coaches or other university staff. However, conflict did occur between team members. This conflict was not classified as severe by any of the women, with most chalking the conflict up to “girls being girls” or “freshman drama.” Jenny mentioned:

PMSing...just one thing bothers you and I mean you’re just so emotional, and practices there’s a person crying sometimes...You have to learn what bothers which person, like if you need to give them a hug when they’re crying or just let them go...

When Dawn, Becky, Allison, Olivia, and Keegan experienced conflict with teammates, they resolved it through straightforward communication. These women stressed
the importance of communication. Additionally, their coaches and upperclassmen teammates stressed communication as a coping skill. Olivia stated:

Conflict between me and my teammates...actually happened...we just talk about it, sit down and talk. I am a big firm believer in putting everything out on the table and let's work through this big, messy pile that we have and get it figured out.

Similarly, Keegan mentioned:

...if I have a problem and I have questions about coaches, I'll go to the coaches. Like if I have a problem with one of my teammates, I'll go to my teammates and if we need to sit down and have a team meeting then we do.

Allison emphasized utilizing the captains and other members of the team as resources to solve any conflicts. She also emphasized keeping the conflict to a limited number of people in order to not upset team cohesion. She stated:

...our captains are very approachable and they have been the people who have really taken care of us...so it's like it I had a problem with one of the girls I wouldn't want to like tell the whole team obviously. You don't want to go around talking behind someone’s back but I’d just be like well what would you do in this situation, like help me understand what this person’s thinking so I'll just usually tell one person because then it’s not really like talking behind their back. You're trying to understand it but if you like go around telling everybody that you're having a problem then I think...that won't help any part of the situation at all...

With limited exposure to conflict during the freshman transition, the women in this study coped well. They negotiated their support systems as well as their relationships with their teams. Without any examples of severe conflict, it is difficult to say how these women would respond. However, given the evidence thus far, I believe they would find the necessary means to resolve any conflict.
Support Services

The final goal of this study was to evaluate how effectively this university met the needs of their freshman female student-athletes through Student Athlete Services. Although these results are not necessarily transferable to other universities, they may allow for the identification of problematic areas. The areas I specifically addressed were general support, study tables, and mandatory educational programming.

Overall, the women in this study viewed Student Athlete Services as a supportive entity. Academic support stood as the service most described by the women. Keegan stated about Student Athlete Services:

They’ve been great like helping me with tutors, getting me tutors as soon as possible. I don’t know what I would do in my math class if I didn’t have a tutor as soon as I did...they just have so many like opportunities to help you and it’s just, I don’t know, it’s a great atmosphere I guess.

Besides assisting with tutors, Student Athlete Services also assists in the development of the whole student-athlete. Olivia discussed how Student Athlete Services offered her the support she needed to make it through the semester:

Great support. Academically great support telling me I can do it, don’t give up now, you’re almost there. There was a point where I was in the middle of my turnaround and I just was so tired. I just wanted to stop. I didn’t think I could do it anymore. [My Student Athlete Counselor] gave me the support to keep going.

The women recognized that Student Athlete Services took an interest in them as people, not just athletes. Jenny discussed her experiences with her Student Athlete Counselor:

...[my Student Athlete Counselor] makes a point, we just had a meeting yesterday to go over my final schedule and he comes down to practices sometimes just to check how we’re doing...always just checks in to see if we need help with any tutors...

For Kala, Student Athlete Services is a place she can turn to in times of need:
They are always there if you need them. They’re there. It’s always nice to know there’s somebody else, especially now when we don’t have coaches to go to. It’s really nice to know that they’re there for us. We kinda all feel left out.

One hundred percent of the women interviewed agreed that Student Athlete Services answers their questions and meets their needs adequately.

Besides general support, I also examined the impact of study tables on these women. To clarify, study tables are mandatory hours spent in a student-athlete only study hall. Not all of the women had mandatory study table hours directed by the coach and their Student Athlete Counselor. For those who did have study table hours, the general consensus was that the hours helped organize their time and provide a studying atmosphere. The women did admit that some of the hours interfered with social activities and that they would have “found time to study without [these] hours.” Allison, who did not have study table hours, commented that she understood the justifications but she felt study table hours could hurt her academics:

I think they would help some freshman. I mean some freshman need that structure…I don’t think it would help me. I actually think it would probably hurt me more than help me. I like studying in my dorm where I have all my resources…if I had to come here (study tables) I might read a book and I wouldn’t be as productive… I kinda like to do my homework by myself and if I came into a room where there’s a lot of other people doing it, I honestly think there would be more distractions there than in my dorm room. I think it kinda depends on how you study and what type of a person you are.

Through my work experiences with Student Athlete Services, I agree with Allison. The current system at this university, which reflects variable study table hours for freshman, takes into account individual abilities. Additionally, I feel that the Student Athlete Counselors at this university should possess more power in determining numbers of hours
than the coach. The power differential should be on par with the amount of power the
Student Athlete Counselor exerts on coaching.

The last issue I examined in reference to Student Athlete Services concerned
mandatory educational programming. As freshman, the women were required to attend
lectures on topics such as alcohol awareness, sexual assault, and nutrition throughout the
semester. The women’s reactions to these programs produced mixed results. Three of the 12
women felt they were a complete waste of time. The biggest complaint was that the
programs did not present anything new. Olivia presented her reactions as:

It was just like...why, why are we here listening to this stuff? Everyone’s aware of it,
it’s gonna happen, it’s not going to happen whatever, it doesn’t really matter.

Dawn affirmed this by responding:

Not really, I don’t think they did anything. Some of them were interesting but we all
knew the information. It had already been drilled into our heads a million times back
in high school.

These women failed to understand the justifications for educational programming.

Student Athlete Services needs to consider emphasizing the justifications as well as the
content.

The remaining nine female student-athletes found varying degrees of value for the
programs. Sadie commented:

I thought they were very affective. I mean everyone knows stuff about drinking but
there’s always something you find out that you didn’t know before.

Keegan accepted that attending the programs was a bit of a hassle but she took advantage of
the opportunity to learn something of value. She stated:

I think they’ve been great. I mean yeah they were a hassle to go to but it’s like if
they’re mandatory, they’re mandatory and you just have to live with it but they’ve
educated me in so many ways...it’s not everyday that you know like the different
facts about alcohol...it's just something that people really don't get to experience and like it helps you in the long run...I still remember back to the nutrition one and I still follow those guides. I still ask myself “well, what did I eat today, was that okay for me?”

Allison presents a sentiment that appreciates the programs and offers suggestions for the future:

I'd say they were fairly effective. Some of them kind of went on a little too long. A lot of the information presented...was either redundant or you kinda already knew...I think part of the problem was like they had a few right away and then it almost seemed like you know it’s once or twice a month. They’re like wait, next week you have to be at, and once I started doing it during the school year, it got a lot harder to work your schedule around. You’re already in the routine of competition and training and, you know, work load for classes it was so hard to go to those... I did not like that at all. I think maybe if they had set more time aside as the beginning when we first got here that probably would have been a lot better because we didn’t have as much going on but at the same time if you do them all at the beginning it would probably be an overload unless you kind of cut back and hit the most important things.

Given these sentiments, Student Athlete Services needs to revisit their educational programming. Utilizing a focus group of student-athletes may provide valuable input for modifying the programs. Perhaps the current situation is the most efficient but Student Athlete Services will not know unless they investigate.

Summary

The results presented in this chapter address the three questions governing this study. They present a perspective that enhances one’s understanding of freshman female student-athlete identity. While the results present the situation at hand for the women who participated in the study, they conjure up implications for solutions and future research to be discussed in the following, and final, chapter.
WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Unfortunately, the current gap in the literature concerning collegiate female student-athletes exists, despite this study. Given the nature of research, a researcher must be selective of what questions she chooses to investigate. Presenting the freshman transition as I have provides a moment of discourse to spur on other related research interests.

The freshman transition has numerous opportunities for future investigation. I chose to specifically examine the expectations and experiences of freshman female student-athletes. However, through my data analysis, I uncovered several issues and avenues for future research. This chapter presents the most prominent issues I uncovered as well as some possible resolutions. Additionally, this chapter provides a discussion of the topics I chose not to address, given the scope of this project.

Successful Transitioning

The freshman transition marks the beginning of a new phase in the lives of freshman female student-athletes. With any endeavor, successful transitioning is not guaranteed. However, it is clear that the freshman female student-athletes involved in this study transitioned successfully through their first collegiate semester. Success, by my standards, is evident in a number of measurements. First, all of the 12 women completed their first semester and enrolled for second semester classes. (During the completion of this write-up,
all of the women were still enrolled at this university.) Second, when asked, none of the women expressed any reservations towards this university or any devastating experiences during the transition. Even though a few of the women encountered challenges with academics and/or athletics, they all found a way to manage these challenges. Some of the women turned to their Student Athlete Counselors for guidance, some utilized other support systems such as team and family, and some simply took it upon themselves to buckle down and tackle their challenges themselves. Regardless of their methods, the 12 freshman female student-athletes found a way to succeed. Third, Student Athlete Services at this university, whose mission is to assist all student-athletes in meeting with success, proved able to handle the needs of these women. All 12 of the women expressed beliefs that Student Athlete Services acts as an advocate on their behalf and would assist whenever possible.

Unfortunately, I am aware that the successful transitioning experienced by these women may not be a product of the system in which they participated but a product of some quality not addressed in this study. In light of this, future research needs to examine the possibility of this quality. More emphasis should be placed on identity formation prior to and during the freshman transition.

**Integration of Freshman Female Student-Athletes**

One aspect of the freshman transition I deemed meaningful from my own perspective as well as the perspectives of the women participating in this study is integration. By integration I am referring to two items: a) identifying with an in-group other than athletics and b) involvement in campus activities unrelated to athletics. Both of these I feel are lacking among freshman female student-athletes.
The freshman transition is a time of new experiences. Unfamiliar experiences accompany new experiences. Striking me the most in my data analysis was the formation of an identity that almost entirely focused on athletics for these women. Becky and Olivia discussed feeling lost when they had free time away from the demands and schedule of their sports. Most of the women could not imagine not being involved with athletics even if they could not compete athletically. When talking about personal success or personal friendships, the team was the focus of these conversations. "I do not want to let the team down" was the mantra for academic success. Socially, only five of the women interacted with non-student-athletes on a regular basis. This is a point of contention since all 12 of the women entered the freshman transition expecting to interact with non-student-athletes and to be involved in campus activities.

Future research needs to assess more thoroughly how the lack of integration of female student-athletes into the non-athletic collegiate life affects identity formation. Along this line, Student Athlete Services departments or Student Affairs departments need to assess and provide avenues for integration of female student-athletes. Such integration may provide freshman female student-athletes with direction to handle the downtime away from athletics. If, for some reason, the student-athlete schedule does not permit any further integration, Student Athlete Services must implement programming which educates freshman women on the lack of integration. For my participants, their lack of involvement with non-student-athletes was unanticipated at the beginning of the freshman transition and a bit of a let down.
Recognition of Female Student-Athletes and Women’s Sports

Title IX provides women with opportunities for collegiate athletic experiences that are comparable to the opportunities for men. However, inequalities still exist. Seven of the 12 women in this study specifically addressed the differences they noticed between men and women’s sports. First, women’s sports at this university do not receive as much recognition as the men’s sports. While some of this is attributed to their status as non-revenue sports, some should be attributed to the meaning the athletic department and the surrounding community attach to women’s sports.

Women’s basketball at this university has achieved relatively high status, as evidenced by attendance and community recognition of student-athletes. However, this is the only women’s sport at that level. The 12 women recognize that women’s basketball is at the top of the hierarchy and the non-women’s basketball players in this study would like to experience some of that recognition. By increasing the value placed on women’s sports through funding, marketing, etc., freshman female student-athletes may not have to contend as much with thoughts that women’s sports are “not that interesting because [they are] girl’s sports” or that they, as female student-athletes have to “prove to [society] that it is really worth a chance.”

A second difference commented on by the women in this study concerns the differences in expectations placed on male and female student-athletes. Several of the women feel more is expected out of them socially and academically. Female student-athletes traditionally graduate at higher rates and have an average GPA higher than male student-athletes (Cooper 2004). Some of the women expressed the concern that they are viewed by society (professors, athletic department staff, students, etc.) as students first and athletes...
second. While this may not be a negative assessment by the public, it does suggest inequity from the standpoint that male student-athletes can “get away” with more academically than female student-athletes. A few of the women expressed notions that male student-athletes have “a built in excuse” to not succeed academically since they are athletes first. They are allowed to make mistakes not appropriate for female student-athletes.

Future research should investigate the perceptions female and male student-athletes have of each other as well as the perceptions of those they come in contact with in a university setting. Even if the actual expectations are the same for female and male student-athletes, the women in this study perceive that they are not. Either way, perceptions need to change in order to create a collegiate environment that not only values athletic success but academic success as well. Continued assessment and enforcement of the principles of Title IX will assist female student-athletes in reaching equity with males.

The Path Not Taken

The relative non-existence of freshman female student-athletes in the literature provides numerous opportunities for continued investigation. The data gathering undertaken in this study yielded such opportunities. My lack of inclusion of the remaining data reflects my particular research questions. Instead of focusing on the expectations and experiences of freshman female student-athletes, I could have taken other paths. For instance, I could have addressed issues the literature deems as specifically affecting female student-athletes such as eating/exercise disorders, the impact of sports related injuries, or sexual harassment. Also, I could have more thoroughly evaluated this university and the interactions of freshman female student-athletes with athletic department and university staff and faculty. Additionally,
following a more stringent line concerning identity formation, role definition, and self-categorization would have allowed me to examine the impact of the athletic culture on these women prior to and during the freshman transition.

All of the previously mentioned paths for continued research are valid in their own right. Selecting a research focus is more a matter of taste than a matter of convenience. Hopefully, future researchers will select collegiate female student-athletes, freshmen or not, as appropriate research subjects in order to narrow the gap in the literature concerning female student-athletes.

Conclusion

Overall, this study provides a glimpse into the freshman transition of female student-athletes. While the freshman transition is a multifaceted concept, it has never been articulated in this manner. The freshman transition is a valid research focus and a meaningful phase in the lives of student-athletes. While I now leave this study of the freshman transition as an unfinished project, as all research is in my opinion, I hope to return to it one day with more experience and new insight.
APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of Study: The Freshman Transition: A study of Female Student Athletes
Investigators: Malinda A. Cooper, BA

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the ways freshman female student athletes navigate the transition from high school to college. You are being invited to participate in this study because you will be a freshman, female student athlete at XXXXXX in the Fall of 2004.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this study, your participation will last for the Fall 2004 semester and will consist of three interviews lasting approximately one hour each. During the study you may expect the following study procedures to be followed. You will be asked to answer interview questions about your roles and attitudes as a student athlete as well as how effectively the support structures offered to you as a student athlete meet your needs. Also, you will be asked to complete a journal activity that allows you to speak candidly about how the identities you maintain impact your first semester as a college student.

All interviews will be tape recorded to ensure accuracy of information discussed. Once the data has been fully analyzed and processed, the tapes will be destroyed.

RISKS

While participating in this study you may experience the following risks: No foreseeable risks at this time from participating in this study.

BENEFITS

If you decide to participate in this study there may be no direct benefit to you. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by providing an understanding of how freshman, female student athletes meet with success during their first semester at college while dealing with the rigors of an NCAA athletic program. This insights gain will help athletic departments assist future student athletes meet with success.
COSTS AND COMPENSATION

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study. Compensation is considered an “extra benefit” as defined by the NCAA and would jeopardize your eligibility. However, your participation will count towards the mandatory study hours all freshman student athletes are required to complete.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken: a fictitious name will be assigned to each participant for use in data analysis and reports and athletic department personnel will not have access to the responses of the participants. All data gathered will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and/or in password protected computer files. The data will be kept for a year after the completion of the project. After this time, all data will be destroyed. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study. For further information about the study contact Malinda Cooper, Investigator, @ 515-294-1299 or Dr. Larry Ebbers, Supervising Professor, @ 515-294-8067. If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the Human Subjects Research Office, 2810 Beardshear Hall, (515) 294-4566; austinger@iastate.edu or the Research Compliance Officer, Office of Research Compliance, 2810 Beardshear Hall, (515) 294-3115; dament@iastate.edu

***************************************************************************
***

SUBJECT SIGNATURE
Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Subject’s Name (printed) ________________________________

__________________________ (Subject’s Signature) _______________________

(Date)

(Signature of Parent/Guardian or Legally Authorized Representative)

__________________________ (Date) __________________________

INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of their questions have been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

__________________________ (Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent) __________________________

(Date)
## APPENDIX B

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Interview</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Goals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What is it like being a student-athlete?</td>
<td>Identity – how my participants see themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What is it like being a female student-athlete?</td>
<td>Identity with gender – how my participants see themselves as a gendered SA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When you think about the role of a student-athlete, what comes to mind?</td>
<td>Role identity – understand the function of an SA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is the role different for a female student-athlete than a male student-athlete?</td>
<td>Role identity w/ gender conflict – do they acknowledge a difference in function between genders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do you feel that other people’s perceptions of student-athletes affect you?</td>
<td>Interactions – negotiated functions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If so, do they affect your growth and interaction with others?</td>
<td>Interactions – how negotiated functions affect them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What is it like being a college student?</td>
<td>Identity – how do they see themselves in the larger context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What do you think of your instructors and the other students in your classes?</td>
<td>Understand their initial perceptions of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What do you think they think of you? Of athletics in general?</td>
<td>Interactions – negotiated understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are your reactions to their opinions?</td>
<td>Interactions – affects on identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What do you plan on getting out of this semester?</td>
<td>Initial goals – open to any aspect of social existence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is there anything that makes you nervous about this first semester? Is there anything that you are excited about?</td>
<td>Initial expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do collegiate student-athletes differ from high school student-athletes? How?</td>
<td>Identity and role identification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do you think you would feel differently if you were a male student-athlete? Why or why not?</td>
<td>Gender conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do these perceptions affect you?</td>
<td>Interactions and gender conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What are your academic expectations, both positive and negative, of this first semester at ISU?</td>
<td>Goal identification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are your expectations, both positive and negative, of your team this first semester at ISU?</td>
<td>Goal identification</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are your social expectations, both positive and negative, of this first semester at ISU?</td>
<td>Goal identification</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are your social expectations, both positive and negative, of Iowa State University this first semester at ISU?</td>
<td>Goal identification</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When thinking about skills (such as communication skills, social skills, or organizational skills) you use in all sort of settings, how has athletics contributed to your ability to develop these skills?</td>
<td>Importance of athletics in shaping personal skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How influential has athletics been in developing these skills?</td>
<td>Values placed on athletics in contributing to success</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How will these skills you developed through athletics help you this semester?</td>
<td>Values placed on athletics in contributing to success</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How important is family to you?</td>
<td>Social interaction and values</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How important are friendships to you?</td>
<td>Social interaction and values</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is it important for you to have friendships outside of athletics? If so, how do you develop them?</td>
<td>Value discrepancies between athletics and non-athletics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is it difficult socializing with non-athletes?</td>
<td>Identity and interactions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does the athletic schedule influence your relationships with others?</td>
<td>Interference of athletics on interactions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What kind of help or direction would you like this semester?</td>
<td>Understanding of needs (confidence)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you think is the role of Student Athlete Services in your first semester?</td>
<td>Initial understanding of services available through SAS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does the freshman transition mean to you?</td>
<td>Transition expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are some strategies you will use to get through the freshman transition?</td>
<td>Ability to identify strengths and weaknesses and how to utilize them to achieve success</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Journal**

1) What is the best thing (things) that has happened so far this semester?

2) What challenges have you had to face (i.e. classes, team, social, financial, athletic department, mental, physical – big or small challenges)? How did you overcome them? If you have not overcome them yet, what kind of assistance would help you?

3) What strategies do you use to get through each day? By this I mean do you use the advice of others, do you work off of habit, do you think about past experiences, do you just do what feels right, do you look to friends to relieve the stress of the day, etc?
4) How do you feel about being a female student-athlete? Has this changed from the first part of the semester?

Post-Interview

Theme 1 – Revisiting Pre-Interview Questions
Now that you have experienced your first semester as a collegiate athlete lets revisit some of the questions from our initial interview.

• What has it been like being a student-athlete?
• What has it been like being a female student-athlete?
• What do you think is the role of a student-athlete such as on campus or in the community?
• How is the role different for a female student-athlete and a male student-athlete?

Thinking back to our first interview at the beginning of the semester, let’s revisit the expectations that we talked about. The following questions are about those expectations and whether or not you have met them or they have changed.

• For academic expectations you stated...
• Your team expectations were...
• Your social expectations were...
• From this university you expected...
• Based on these expectations, what has been the biggest disappointment this semester?
• What has been the greatest surprise for you this semester?

We have spent time discussing what it is like to be a student-athlete as well as the role of a student-athlete. Now, let’s discuss the topic of importance.

• Which is more important to you: being a student or being an athlete?
• Why?
• What kinds of things do you do to demonstrate your status as a student? As an athlete?
• How do you think the following groups view you?
  a) Teammates
  b) Class mates
  c) Instructors
  d) Other peers
• If you could not participate in athletics at your current level anymore, how do you think this would affect you?
• What kinds of things would you do to compensate for your lack of athletic participation?

You, as a student-athlete, are a valued member of this university and community. You bring value and recognition to both.

• As a student-athlete what benefits do you feel you deserve (at any level) that a non-student-athlete would not receive? Explain.
Theme 2 – Issues Affecting Student-Athletes
As a student-athlete there are numerous issues with which you must contend. Let’s talk about a few of them.

- As an ISU athlete you are a member of a special population. Do you ever feel targeted either positively or negatively as a student-athlete? By this I mean separated from non-student-athletes. In what ways?
- In what types of settings do you feel the most targeted?
- How does this affect you?
- Were you ever targeted in high school? How?
- Have you ever talked with anyone about being targeted?

As a female student athlete it is possible that you experience collegiate athletics differently than male student-athletes. Researchers have identified a few issues that specifically affect female student-athletes; how about we see if you have experienced or have any concerns regarding these issues.

- To what extent have you experienced issues with an eating disorder, exercise disorder, or nutrition issue?
- Why do you think female student-athletes are more susceptible to these issues?
- To what extent have you had to deal with sports-related injuries?
- To what extent have you experienced any forms of sexual harassment as an athlete, as a student, or just in general?
- If you have experienced sexual harassment, how have you dealt with sexual harassment or how might you handle it in the future?

Theme 3 – Motivation, Pressures, Rigors
Everyday this semester you have awakened as a student-athlete and you have participated in your daily activities as a student-athlete.

- What keeps you going?
- To what extent have you thought about quitting? Why or why not?
- What motivates you the most?

As a student-athlete you must contend with a very rigorous schedule. From sun up to sun down your days are pretty much scheduled for you.

- What do you think about this schedule?
- Does it ever bother you that you cannot always decide your daily schedule? How and why?
- How would you change this past semester’s schedule if you could?
- How many hours a week do you devote to your responsibilities as one of the following:
  a) As a student?
  b) As an athlete?
  c) As a social person?
Is it important that you (personally) spend as much time on academics as you do with your athletic events?
Do your teammates or friends put pressure on you to spend time with them when you could be doing homework?
Do your study table hours help you organize your academic time? Explain.
Do these hours take away from other activities? Explain.
Do you feel that study table hours help freshman get accustomed to college life?

You have a lot of responsibilities not just to yourself but to your team, ISU, your family, etc. With responsibilities come pressures.

- What kind of responsibilities do you feel you have had this past semester?
- What kind of pressures do you put on yourself to respond to these responsibilities?
- What kinds of pressures do these responsibilities put on you?
- How do these pressures affect your execution of your responsibilities?
- Do you personally feel respected as a student and by whom? As an athlete and by whom?
- Do you feel there are stereotypes about you as a student-athlete? If so, what are these stereotypes and who do they come from?
- Do you feel pressure to break these stereotypes? Explain.

**Theme 4 – Integration into Collegiate Life**
Entering Division I collegiate athletics involves many new experiences and meeting new people. Working within the new system can present challenges.

- How would you describe your relationships with the following:
  a) Your team
  b) Your coaches
  c) Your classmates
  d) Your social environment
- Describe your non-athletic/non-academic life.
- How involved are you in on-campus social activities?
- What has been the greatest obstacle to integration?
- What has aided your integration the most this semester?

**Theme 5 – Coping Skills**
New experiences also mean unfamiliar experiences. Your comfort zone may have been infringed upon as you transitioned into collegiate athletics.

- How have you dealt with the challenges of academics?
- How have you handles conflicts between you and your teammates and/or coaches?
- If you were in season this semester, how did you deal with intense competition?
- When you experience conflict or tension what do you do to overcome this?

Most of my participants mentioned the importance of family in their lives. It must be difficult being away from your family.

- How have you handled being away from your family?
What have you used as a substitute, if anything, for your family to help you cope with this transition?

Stress is a phenomenon everyone must deal with. As a student-athlete, you experience stress unique to your particular condition.

- What activities do you personally engage in to relax in your spare time?
- Are there certain places you like to go to or certain places where you hang out with your friends?
- What support do you receive from the following groups:
  a) Teammates
  b) Coaches
  c) Other peers
  d) Student Athlete Services
  e) Other Groups

Theme 6 - NCAA & Institutional Regulations and Support
As a student athlete you are required to maintain certain academic standards in the form of GPA and degree completion percentages. It is the responsibility of Student Athlete Services to educate you on these standards.

- Are you familiar with these standards? If so, how did you learn about them?
- Do you feel Student Athlete Services has educated you on the rules for maintaining eligibility? What could they do differently to help you?
- How well does Student Athlete Services help you integrate into the university system? By this I mean how well did they help you understand where to go on campus to get your needs met?
- Do you consider Student Athlete Services an advocate on your behalf?
- What would you like Student Athlete Services to do for you that they are not currently doing?

A specific service offered by Student Athlete Services is life skills programming. This program is meant to aid student-athletes in their personal, professional, and emotional growth.

- This semester you have attended mandatory life skills programs, how effective were these seminars in helping you understand the given topic?
- Do you feel these programs were beneficial to other student-athletes?
- What would you like the life skills program to do for you?

Theme 7 - Final Thoughts on the Freshman Transition
This semester has been an important transition into a new phase of your life. This transition may have gone smoothly or it may have been a bit choppy but you have survived it thus far.

- How would you describe the freshman transition that you experienced?
- How important is it for us to understand the transition of freshman female student-athletes?
And one final question about athletics.
- Overall, how do you feel athletics has shaped you?

Theme 8 – Reflection
Now that the information gathering is complete about the freshman transition you have experienced, I would like for you to reflect on this project we participated in.
- What did you think of this project?
- How did it make you feel talking about yourself as a student-athlete?
- What would you suggest I do differently or add in the future?

Is there anything I have not covered or anything else you would like to add?
## APPENDIX C
### DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

#### Freshman Female Student-Athletes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Allison</th>
<th>Becky</th>
<th>Claire</th>
<th>Dawn</th>
<th>Jenny</th>
<th>Kala</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>Middle Class</td>
<td>Lower Working Class</td>
<td>Middle Class</td>
<td>Middle Class</td>
<td>Upper Middle Class</td>
<td>Middle Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Region</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent's Marital Status</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Father - Married</td>
<td>Mother - Deceased</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siblings*</td>
<td>1-OS 1-YB</td>
<td>1-OS 1-YS</td>
<td>3-OS 2-OB</td>
<td>3-OS 1-OB</td>
<td>1-OB 1-YB</td>
<td>1-OS 1-OB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major</td>
<td>Pre-Medicine</td>
<td>Pre-Business</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Health and Fitness Management</td>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>Pre-Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship</td>
<td>Partial</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Partial</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Graduation Size</td>
<td>~900</td>
<td>~68</td>
<td>~539</td>
<td>~230</td>
<td>~900</td>
<td>~21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Freshman Female Student-Athletes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Katy</th>
<th>Keegan</th>
<th>Morgan</th>
<th>Olivia</th>
<th>Sadie</th>
<th>Sarah</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>Middle Class</td>
<td>Middle Class</td>
<td>Middle Class</td>
<td>Upper Middle Class</td>
<td>Middle Class</td>
<td>Upper Middle Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Region</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
<td>Midwest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent's Marital Status</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Divorced, Both Remarried</td>
<td>Together</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siblings*</td>
<td>3-OB 8-Step</td>
<td>1-YS</td>
<td>2-OB</td>
<td>1-YS</td>
<td>1-OB 2-YS</td>
<td>1-YS 1-OB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>Elementary Education</td>
<td>Pre-Physical Therapy</td>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>Elementary Education</td>
<td>Health and Human Performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarship</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Partial</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Graduation Size</td>
<td>~300</td>
<td>~650</td>
<td>~368</td>
<td>~400</td>
<td>~80</td>
<td>~450</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*OS = Older Sister  YS = Younger Sister  OB = Older Brother  YB = Younger Brother
REFERENCES


Carodine, Keith, Kevin F. Almond, and Katherine K. Gratto. 2001. “College Student Athlete Success In and Out of the Classroom.” New Directions for Student Services 93:19-34.


Person, Dawn R., Marcella Benson-Quaziena, and Ann Marie Rogers. 2001. “Female Student Athletes and Student Athletes of Color.” *New Directions for Student Services* 93:55-64.


