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Lauren E. Kelba

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WOMEN'S GENDER IDENTITIES AND NCAA POLICY

by

Lauren E. Kelba

A THESIS

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WOMEN'S GENDER IDENTITIES AND NCAA POLICY

Lauren Elyse Kelba, M.A.

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Advisor: Corey Rumann

Since the implementation of Title IX in 1972 and resulting inclusion of women within NCAA intercollegiate athletic programs, participation numbers have increased dramatically at the post-secondary level (Miller, Heinrich, & Baker, 2000). With participation numbers increasing, the NCAA has developed a number of policies and regulations, including published policies and recommendations for practice in regards to gender equity and inclusion. These publications include *Equity and Title IX in Intercollegiate Athletics*, *Gender Equity Planning Best Practices*, and the *NCAA Inclusion of Transgender Student-Athletes*. With these policies, the NCAA has made efforts to improve the experiences of those who have marginalized gender identities; specifically for cisgender women. However, little is known about how these policies and recommendations support the lived experiences of student-athletes who identify as women.

This study has been designed and implemented to address that lack of knowledge. This research study explores how NCAA policies and recommendations for practice impact the lived experiences of student-athletes with marginalized gender identities. I interviewed four participants twice each to learn about their experiences. The three themes that emerged from this study encompassed the role these women felt policy played in their day-to-day experiences as student-athletes, their experiences being a woman on their college campus and within their athletic department, and their perceptions of the various educational and life skills programming participants received or did not receive.

This study was designed and implemented in a way that addressed the lack of research on the qualitative experiences of women student-athletes, outside of just participation numbers and the increase in scholarship opportunities for women in the NCAA. Several recommendations for student affairs practice and implications for future research resulted from this study.

Dedication

To all of the women who have experienced gender discrimination in athletics, this thesis is for you. Thank you for paving the way for gender equity in intercollegiate athletics and allowing so many after you to have incredible student-athlete experiences.

To Carol Cook. It was a joy to go through my Master's degree with you. Thank you for also paving the way.

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Chapter One

Introduction

According to federal Title IX legislation, “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of gender, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program receiving Federal financial assistance” (Shaw, 1995, p. 7). While this legislation was passed 46 years ago, institutions of higher education that are members of the National Collegiate Athletic Association, the NCAA, still may not be fully supporting the needs and identity development of the women on their college campuses, particularly their student-athletes. Since the implementation of Title IX and subsequent inclusion of women within NCAA intercollegiate athletic programs, participation numbers have increased exponentially at the post-secondary level (Miller, Heinrich, & Baker, 2000). With participation numbers increasing, along with subsequent scholarship opportunities, the NCAA has released a number of internal bylaws and regulations, including published policies and recommendations for practice in regards to gender equity and inclusion. With these policies, the NCAA has made efforts to improve the experiences of those who have marginalized gender identities. By marginalized gender identities, I am referring to those who do not identify as male: cisgender women, transgender women, transgender men, and gender non-binary individuals on college campuses. This study aimed to explore the experiences of a wide variety of marginalized gender identities but focused on cisgender women’s experiences since those were the identities of participants. Little is known about the extent that policies and recommendations support the lived experiences, and the personal, academic, and athletic goals of student-athletes who identify as having a marginalized gender identity. This study will focus on the experiences of female

student-athletes due to the nature of participants and future studies are needed to better understand the experiences of trans and non-binary student athletes.

This study has been designed and implemented to address the lack of knowledge about women's experiences. By analyzing how current policies and recommendations for practice published by the NCAA impact the lived experiences of student-athletes, we are able to see the extent that the NCAA has designed intentional practices in regards to the inclusion of women in their policies and programs. In this study, I was able to speak to four participants who were willing to share their experiences. By conducting multiple interviews with each participant, I was able to gain a deeper insight into their lived experiences and how they felt NCAA policies did or did not support their identities. I was able to learn how their gender and gender identities were respected at their institution in general, regardless of their student-athlete status, and learned about the educational programs that their institution did and did not provide to their student-athletes in regards to inclusivity and/or life skills programming. The three themes that emerged from this study encompassed the role these women felt policy played in their day-to-day experiences as student-athletes, their experiences being a woman on their college campus and within their athletic department, and their perceptions of the various educational and life skills programming the participants received or did not receive. This study was designed and implemented in a way that addressed the lack of research on the qualitative experiences of women student-athletes, outside of just participation numbers and the increase in scholarship opportunities for women in the NCAA.

Several recommendations for student affairs practice and implications for future research resulted from this study, both of which will be explored in greater detail in Chapter Five. Recommendations for practice for student affairs professional and athletic administrators include

increasing the focus on education we provide coaches at NCAA member institutions, work towards improving the overall campus climate in regards to the treatment of women at institutions of higher education, and increasing the transparency and publicity of policies in place. Implications for future research included continuing to explore the lived experiences of student-athletes who have marginalized gender identities and assessing campus climate in qualitative ways that identify more distinct action items. While this thesis provides a unique look at the qualitative stories of the participants, more qualitative work will be necessary to support the experiences of those who have marginalized gender identities.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to utilize a policy framework to help understand how NCAA policy affects the lived experiences of student-athletes with marginalized gender identities. Historically as an organization, the NCAA was set up to serve male student-athletes and men's athletic teams and programs (Bass, Schaeperkoetter, & Bunds, 2015). This study aimed to understand the lived experiences of college student athletes with marginalized gender identities and to inform student affairs professionals, higher education administrators, and those who work in athletic administration on how to better serve student-athletes with marginalized gender identities. By marginalized gender identities, I am referring to cisgender women, transwomen, transmen, and non-binary gender neutral student-athletes participating in intercollegiate athletics across all divisions and institutions. However, the participants in my study all identified as cisgender women.

Previous studies have analyzed the increase in participation numbers for women within intercollegiate athletics since the implementation of Title IX in 1972 (Bass, Schaeperkoetter, & Bunds, 2015), but few studies have been done to explore the lived experiences of their day-to-

day lives. Additionally, little to no research has been done on the experiences of transgender student-athletes across the NCAA or even high school levels. Transgender student-athletes are an emerging population research is needed to ensure we are adequately serving that population as student affairs administrators.

Significance of Study

The significance of this study is highlighted by the current national climate examining how as a society we treat women overall. While female student-athlete participation has grown since 1972, in stark contrast, research on the quality of their lived experiences as student-athletes has been limited. In an era of #MeToo, Time's Up, and Larry Nassar, the experiences of college women and student-athletes who identify as women deserve to be heard and recognized. By trying to understand the lived experiences of women college athletes through a policy framework in comparison to a theoretical framework, it allows us to fully explore whether policies and recommendations for practice from the NCAA are adequate in supporting the identities of those student-athletes who do not identify as men.

The NCAA as an organization was established to only serve men, from its Ivy League rowing beginning in 1852 (Bass, Schaeperkoetter, & Bunds, 2015). The establishment of athletic conferences, the expansion of football programs, and the organizational adaptations the NCAA met in order to accommodate the changing college populations post World War I and World War II, allowed the NCAA to cater to certain male demographics (Hums & MacLean, 2004). As discussed in Chapter Two, the NCAA truly only began to accommodate women into their athletic programs when it was federally mandated and they found enough incentive to do so. Today, forty-six years after Title IX legislation was passed, studies on the experiences of student-athletes who are women have been limited participation and scholarship numbers (Bass,

Schaeperkoetter, & Bunds, 2015). The lived experiences of these student-athletes, including a deeper look into the culture of their athletic department, need to be explored.

Research Questions

Three research questions were developed to address the purpose of this study and were aimed at the purpose of understanding the lived experiences of student-athletes with marginalized gender identities. The research questions were developed with a policy analysis and gendered framework in mind:

1. According to the lived experience of participants, how effective are NCAA policies and recommendations for practice at supporting female student-athletes in regards to their academic and athletic goals?
2. To what extent do NCAA policies and recommendations for practice help to facilitate an inclusive environment for female student-athletes?
3. How can educators adapt policy to better fit the lived student-athlete experience for women?

These questions were designed in an attempt to focus on how policy affects lived experience, especially in the case of student-athletes participating in the NCAA, which often is in the public eye. Policy can have implications on culture, attitudes, and public opinion, and has the potential to have a profound impact on student-athletes based on their identities.

Research Design

This qualitative study was designed to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of the participants. By using a qualitative framework, and interviews as my primary form of data collection, I was able to collect and analyze the data and identify thematic findings that truly spoke to the experiences these participants had surrounding their gender and gender

identities, their time as student-athletes, and their knowledge of gender equity policies that influenced their undergraduate careers. This study utilized a constructivist paradigm, with the belief that reality is socially constructed through the participants' lived experiences (Mertens, 2010). Rapport was developed with participants by sharing my own experiences as a student-athlete and as a cisgender woman and we were able to use a shared terminology during the interviews. Using an interview protocol that consisted of two interviews with each participant, while supplying the participants with certain gender equity policies and publications from the NCAA in between the two interviews, allowed for the interviews to take a semi-structured, conversational format. The primary researcher alone transcribed the interviews with the transcription serving as the basis for the data analysis process. The data analysis process moved from an open coding model to an axial coding model, and utilized both color coding techniques and mind mapping techniques. The result of this analysis was an identification of three themes that focused on policy, gender, and educational programming at the athletic department level.

Definition of Terms

A handful of terms are used in this thesis that need to be clearly defined for the reader:

Transgender: An individual whose gender identity is different than the sex the person was identified as having at birth (Beemyn, 2005).

Cisgender: An individual whose gender identity aligns with the sex the person was identified as having as birth (Beemyn, 2005).

NCAA: The National Collegiate Athletic Association is a nonprofit organization that seeks to manage the athletic programs for over 1000 member institutions, and seeks to promote the overall well being of student-athletes (NCAA, 2016).

Student-Athlete: Current or former college students who have participated on an intercollegiate athletic team at the NCAA level, regardless of conference or division.

Title IX: Federal legislation that states “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of gender, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program receiving Federal financial assistance” (Shaw, 1995). Title IX applies to all NCAA member institutions that they received Federal funding, and includes all aspects of intercollegiate athletic programming.

Revenue Generating: NCAA athletic programs and teams that earn revenue for the institution through ticket sales, media contracts, and merchandising.

Non-Revenue Generating: NCAA athletic programs and team that cost the institution money as opposed to contributing financially to the athletic department.

Delimitations

In this study, there were several boundaries that served as delimitations. Participants needed to be current or former student-athletes, with no limitations placed on NCAA division, conference, or sport. Participants also needed to be 19 years of age, in order to participate in the study without permission from parents or guardians. Participants needed to identify as a marginalized gender identity- i.e., a cisgender woman, transgender woman, transgender man, or gender neutral student-athletes. I chose to not limit any other aspects of identity, including race and/or ethnicity, residency status, sexuality, sport, or scholarship status, but those identities were not the focus of this study. As the focus of this study was to analyze how NCAA policy affected the lived experiences of those who have marginalized gender identities, I did not want to restrict participation on any other aspect of identity besides gender and gender identities. This was reflected in my recruitment efforts and informed consent documents.

Limitations

The primary limitation of this study was found in the identities of the participants. Despite my efforts to recruit diverse gender identities to participate in this study, none of the four participants identified as transgender, with three out of the four participants identifying their pronouns as she/her/hers (one participant left the pronoun box blank on the demographic information form). I recognize this limitation in the lack of diversity within marginalized gender identities, and explore this further in Chapter Five. An additional limitation on this study included the time I was able to spend on the project in its entirety, including recruiting participants and analyzing the data. As a Master's student completing this thesis for credit as a graduation requirement, the project began over the Summer of 2017 and needed to be completed by April of 2018. As with other qualitative research, I feel as though there are always more participants to recruit and more stories to hear. I would have loved to have been able to interview double the number of participants, analyze additional policies and recommendations for practice, and explore additional solicitation routes, but the time constraints of the program only enabled me to interview four participants and conduct eight interviews.

Finally, although not the purpose of this study the findings should not be generalized to all college women's athlete experience. The findings pertain only to the lived experiences of the four participants. However, their experiences and my interpretation of those experiences provide important knowledge of the lived experiences of female college athletes and how policies influence their experiences in college.

Conclusion

The following study explores how NCAA policies and published recommendations for practice support those who have marginalized gender identities in their personal, athletic, and

academic goals. While researchers have shown that participation numbers for female student-athletes have increased significantly since the implementation of Title IX in 1972, little is known about the quality of that participation. This study aimed to understand the lived experiences of those who carry identities other than cisgender male athletes within the NCAA, which is an organization that was primarily designed to serve male student-athletes. Cisgender women and transgender women, in particular student-athletes, are a largely under researched population outside of researching their participation numbers at individual institutions for the purposes of Title IX compliance. Utilizing a qualitative research design, with a constructivist paradigm, we are allowed the day-to-day lived experiences to illustrate the data that emerged from an open coding and axial coding process. The intent of this study was also to inform student affairs professional and athletic administrators about how policies are adequately serving this population and how we can better support the identities of student-athletes who have marginalized gender identities.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Introduction

Certain genders and gender identities have been marginalized in the NCAA due to the set-up of systemic processes that cater to dominant gender identities and subsequent student-athlete populations. From the very historical beginnings of the NCAA in 1852, to recent policies regarding transgender athletic participation in the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Summer Olympic Games, cisgender males have been at a significant advantage, both in society and within the athletic community. While progress has been made in terms of female participation, particularly with the creation and implementation of Title IX in 1972 as part of the Educational Amendments, progress does not equal an equitable and inclusive environment. The following literature review covers the historical factors that shaped today's intercollegiate athletics culture, as well as the results of policies that were designed to work towards inclusivity.

History of the NCAA

The first intercollegiate contest was staged between two Ivy League schools with men, the dominant student population, as the participating student-athletes: a varsity rowing competition between Harvard and Yale in 1852 (Bass, Schaeperkoetter, & Bunds, 2015). While there is some research that points to early collegiate athletic activities stemming from student-run campus organizations, 1852 was the first contested athletic event between institutions. While one may not immediately recognize similarities between that first race in the mid 1800's to the large variety of NCAA-sanctioned events today, it is worth noting that the very first contest between different colleges and universities had an official sponsorship: the Boston, Concord & Montreal Railroad Company was the exclusive transportation sponsor of the event (Hums & MacLean,

2004). It is unknown however if many other private corporations bid for the sponsorship in an intense, competitive manner like today's events, and it is also unknown what the sponsorship cost Boston, Concord & Montreal Railroad Company. From 1852 through the late 1800's, intercollegiate athletic competition grew in popularity and scope with football and men's basketball programs making appearances. Benefits of intercollegiate athletics started to emerge, along with subsequent support from faculty and university administrators. These benefits included "increased alumni support, branding, and student applications" (Bass, Schaeperkoetter, & Bunds, 2015, p. 4). The first instance of institutions working together to provide some type of framework or structure for intercollegiate athletics was a meeting held in Chicago on January 11, 1895. This meeting between university officials is considered the predecessor to the Big Ten Conference, where they discussed guidelines for student-athlete scheduling, equipment needs and funding, and eligibility (Bass, Schaeperkoetter, & Bunds, 2015).

Ten years after that first meeting in Chicago, university officials met again in 1905 to discuss the governance necessary for amateur athletic competitions. These meetings that continued through 1905 and 1906 stemmed from a number of different reasons. First and foremost, safety in the sport of football was extremely poorly regulated, resulting in the death of 18 student-athlete football players in 1905 alone (Hums & MacLean, 2004). The initial meeting, organized by President Roosevelt at the White House, resembled a continuation of the mid to late 1800's athletic contests with representation coming only from Ivy League institutions: Harvard, Yale, and Princeton (Bass, Schaeperkoetter, & Bunds, 2015). NYU invited additional institutions to New York City to discuss issues that were becoming just as apparent as safety concerns in football; primarily, the clear need for additional governance and regulation for intercollegiate athletic competitions. In March of 1906, 62 colleges and universities across the country formed

the Intercollegiate Athletic Association of the United States (IAAUS), which became the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) in 1910 (Bass, Schaeperkoetter, & Bunds, 2015). It was in this original NCAA Constitution that athletic administrators derived the first definition for amateurism in regards to student-athlete status:

An amateur sportsman is one who engages in sports for the physical, mental, or social benefits he derives therefrom, and to whom the sport is an avocation. Any college athlete who takes pay for participation in athletics does not meet this definition of amateurism. (Duderstadt, 2009, p.71)

The NCAA persisted through the “Golden Age of Sport” through the 1920’s (Wiggins, 1995), with the additions of more football programs, national championships, an increased variety of sport offerings, and an increase in the number of member institutions. With safety regulations in place for contact and high-risk sports, attention turned to the recruiting process for student-athletes. Increased university enrollment due to the end of World War II, combined with increased spending on athletics, led to the 1948 Sanity Code. The Sanity Code attempted to put parameters on the aid that member institutions could offer a student-athlete, stating that if they met certain academic standards they could receive a full-ride scholarship (Byers & Hammer, 1995). This was abandoned after a short period of time, as not enough member institutions were willing to enact punishment for breaking those rules. It was replaced by the grant-in-aid philosophy, which took away the academic standards needed to obtain a full-ride scholarship. In 1951, as financial considerations started to take the forefront in discussions surrounding the NCAA, Walter Byers was brought on as the first NCAA Executive Director (Hums & MacLean, 2004). 1957 saw the grant-in-aid policy stretched even further, with the NCAA allowing institutions to offer full-ride scholarship (tuition, room, board, books, fees) to student-athletes

who demonstrated no financial need or any resemblance of academic achievement (Sack and Staurowsky, 2005).

“Student-Athletes” Definition. The term “student-athlete” was created and enforced by Walter Byers as a preventive, deliberative measure. Recognizing the adoption of the grant-in-aid policy, with the loss of academic standards being necessary, Byers saw the potential that student-athletes could be considered employees of the institutions (Byers & Hammer, 1995). Recognizing student-athletes as employees of the college or university would lead to a downfall of what the NCAA stood for and a financial disaster for member institutions if student-athletes were able to claim worker’s compensation for athletic related injuries (Byers & Hammer, 1995). Other scholars recognized the premise behind the term “student-athlete” was in response to the negative publicity and poor public opinion surrounding the grant-in-aid scholarship policy (Sack & Staurowsky, 2005, p. 103). The debate surrounding the origin of the term still permeates the majority of present day debates in regards to a “pay-to-play” structure.

Using of the term “student-athlete” has become so widespread, that while it’s not even technically in the dictionary, academics often utilize the phrase to designate populations and subgroups of students. There is even intentionality behind the order of only two words which encourages individuals to be students first, and athletes second (Sack and Staurowsky, 2005). The NCAA mandated college publicists that the phrase student-athlete replace the terms “player” or “athlete” in any news media (Byers & Hammer, 1996, p.69). While Walter Byers maintains this was done to encourage widespread usage of the term student-athlete to increase public opinion of the adopted athletic scholarship policies, other academics referred to this communications rule as an intention to “obscure exploitative practices that profited the institutions involved while violating the fundamental tenets of higher education and human

rights” (Sack & Staurovsky, 2005, p. 107). Today, there has been an increase in scholars and researchers who refuse to use the term in an academic setting, as they believe the title is nothing but a euphemism for an employer-employee relationship that attempts to present itself as upholding amateurism (Staurovsky, 2004).

NCAA Structure. Revenue generation and financial obligations were not just restricted to athletic scholarships. In 1973, the NCAA divided member institutions into three different divisions based on the athletic department’s current and potential revenue generating capabilities (Bass, Schaeperkoetter, & Bunds, 2015). The NCAA stance is that the divisions were and continue to be based upon “funding of athletic programs, scholarships for student-athletes, and fan interest” (NCAA, 2014). Division I institutions could offer student-athletes full-ride grant-in-aid scholarships. Division I colleges and universities were further divided into three different subdivisions, based on football programs alone. Division II institutions could offer partial scholarships, and Division III institutions could not offer student-athletes athletic scholarships.

Division I Institutions. Division I colleges and universities account for the smallest number of institutions, but not student-athletes. Approximately 250 institutions belong to Division I subdivisions including just over 170,000 student-athletes (NCAA, 2014). The three subdivisions of Division I are based on football programs. Division I-A, or Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) colleges and universities, include the “Power Five” conferences due to the size and scope of their football programs: the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), Southeastern Conference (SEC), Big Ten, Big 12, and Pac 12 Conferences, as well as several smaller conferences that still have football at the forefront of their athletic departments. Division I-AA, the Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) schools, take part in a playoff style tournament at the end of the football season. The third subdivision, Division I-AAA, is comprised of NCAA

institutions who don't sponsor football programs. Outside of the overwhelming influence of football, what sets Division I institutions apart is the revenue generated from fan interest and subsequent television contracts. Often times revenue is being generated for the NCAA and not even its member institutions. In 2013, revenue generated for colleges and universities through football and men's basketball contracts exceeded \$25 million (Bass, Schaeperkoetter, & Bunds, 2015).

Division II Institutions. Approximately 300 institutions and 110,000 student-athletes make up the middle division of the NCAA. These colleges and universities, offering only partial scholarships and not full-ride scholarships, have lower operating costs with less expensive costs for recruiting travel and state-of-the-art-facilities, which allows them to forgo the astronomical television contracts (Bass, Schaeperkoetter, & Bunds, 2015).

Division III Institutions. As of 2014, the NCAA had just over 450 colleges and universities represented in Division III represented over 180,000 student-athletes (NCAA, 2014). Besides the scholarship regulations, Division III student-athletes are expected to fully commit to their academics first and their athletics second. This organizational philosophy is reflected in the official Division III Philosophy Statement: "Division III institutions assure that athletics participants are not treated differently from other members of the student body" (NCAA, 2014). Such statements are not found in official philosophy statements for Division I and Division II handbooks.

Title IX

Outside of the historical foundations of the NCAA, one of the largest influences on intercollegiate athletic competition was the creation and implementation of Title IX legislation in 1972. The wording of the Title IX amendment was very similar to the wording of the 1964 Civil

Rights Act, which exemplified equitable access. Title IX, a provision in the Educational Amendments, mandated that: “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of gender, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program receiving Federal financial assistance” (Shaw, 1995).

With colleges and universities across the country receiving federal financial assistance, women’s athletic teams were necessary to provide equal access to university programs. At the time, the NCAA had a total of zero women’s athletic teams. To obtain the same governance and regulatory standards the NCAA had created for men’s athletic teams, university administrators from across the country created the Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW) (Bass, Schaeperkoetter, & Bunds, 2015). In addition to providing assistance to the governance of women’s intercollegiate athletic competitions and teams, there was an intentional motive to promote participation and sport education. This was done as a deliberate move to combat the commercialization of NCAA-sponsored men’s athletic competitions (Bass, Schaeperkoetter, & Bunds, 2015). While the NCAA was continuing to grow in ways that promoted the commercialization of intercollegiate athletics, the AIAW wanted to include participation and education as priorities.

While the NCAA and the AIAW coexisted peacefully for a while, the NCAA eventually saw a way to earn revenue from women’s athletic teams as a product, with the AIAW programs earning additional federal funding. The NCAA and the AIAW eventually saw themselves bidding for institutions, with the NCAA able to offer significant financial benefits to those institutions. In the late 1970’s, the NCAA was able to incentivize women’s athletic programs to stray from the AIAW by agreeing to tie in the women’s basketball national championship to men’s Final Four tournament and subsequent television contracts (Bass, Schaeperkoetter, &

Bunds, 2015). The AIAW folded in 1982, allowing the NCAA to take almost complete control of the intercollegiate athletic competition system in the United States.

Title IX legislation was never designed to be the heavily-debated topic it is today. Its purpose was to promote and enforce equal access across genders to educational programming, including activities aligned with math, science, and engineering. As opposed to being recognized as a regulation that promotes fairness, Title IX has emerged as a hot-button issue that has had positive and negative consequences for the gender balance in intercollegiate athletics. Several university athletic administrators aligned with their legislator when they foresaw the impact the legislation would have on intercollegiate athletics in particular, and several bills were introduced to try and block the negative consequences Title IX would have on male revenue generating sports. None of those bills ever passed (Bass, Schaeperkoetter, & Bunds, 2015). The Office of Civil Rights became the government office to enforce Title IX, and compliance standards were released in 1979.

Since the enactment of Title IX in 1972, women's participation in intercollegiate athletics has increased significantly. From 1977 to 2000, the average number of women's team across all institutions increased from 5.61 to 7.5, and the number of women participating in intercollegiate athletics has gone from approximately 32,000 to over 110,000 (Miller, Heinrich, & Baker, 2000). Progress has been made steadily over the past several decades. Over the 1981-1982 academic year, women made up only 27.9% of student-athletes across all divisions and accounted for 26.4% of student-athletes at Division I institutions (NCAA, 2016, p. 82-83). During the 1995-1996 academic year women only accounted for 37% of Division I student-athletes and only 29% of Division I-A student-athletes (Miller, Heinrich, & Baker, 2000). While the 10% jump is promising, at the time women made up 53% of total undergraduate enrollment (Miller, Heinrich,

& Baker, 2000). However ten years later women made up 46.7% of student-athletes at the Division I level and 43.5% of student-athletes across all divisions (NCAA, 2016). At this time, a gender equity report has not been provided by the NCAA for the 2016-2017 academic year.

Title IX Compliance. In 1979, the Office of Civil Rights issued a policy interpretation to Title IX that outlined how it would be enforced. Compliance was offered as a three-prong test, which allowed institutions to choose the method that best fit their athletic department to prove equal access was being offered. The three prongs were:

1. Providing opportunities for participation in intercollegiate sports by gender in approximate proportion to undergraduate enrollment (substantial proportionality);
2. Demonstrating a history and continued practice of expanding opportunities for the underrepresented gender (continued expansion); or,
3. Presenting proof that it fully effectively accommodating the athletic interest of the underrepresented gender (full accommodation) (Bass, Schaeperkoetter, & Bunds, 2015, p. 14).

Additional policy interpretations were never issued. *Substantial proportionality*, the first prong offered for the compliance test, was never defined by the Office of Civil Rights which allowed member institutions to define their own interpretation of it. Generally, it's been assumed that *substantial proportionality* means that the percentage of female student-athletes would need to be within 5% of the percentage of total female undergraduate students for that institution (Stafford, 2004). Additional terms never defined by the Office of Civil Rights included *history and continued practice* and *full accommodation*. Despite the policy interpretations being released in 1979, one study found that over the 2000-2001 academic year only 24.6% of NCAA Division I member institutions (79 out of 321) were in compliance with Title IX (Stafford, 2004).

Title IX and Men's Sports. There is a myth among athletic departments that Title IX is the cause of many men's athletic teams being dropped from member institutions, particularly if those sports are non-revenue generating. The numbers, however, paint a different portrayal for the justifications of the additions and eliminations of various sports teams. It is true that women gained significantly more athletic teams after the implementation of Title IX, but not at the loss of men's teams; rather, it was out of necessity in an attempt to obtain equality. Women's teams were also eliminated during this time, not just added with no justification. Over an 18 year period, from 1978-1996, 2,239 women's athletic teams were added at NCAA member with institutions, with 581 teams being dropped, for a net gain of 1,658 women's teams added across all divisions (Sabo, 1998). Over the same 18 year period, 927 men's athletic teams were added and 853 teams were dropped, for a net gain of 74 men's athletics teams (Sabo, 1998). While this data alone contributes to the stigma that Title IX is to blame for the elimination of men's sports teams, further research shows that narrative is inaccurate. When you narrow the addition and elimination data to Division I-A and Division I-AA institutions, over the same 18 year period, colleges and universities added only 90 men's athletic team programs while eliminating 242 men's teams, for a net loss of 152 men's athletic programs (Sabo, 1998). The number of men's athletic team programs actually increased across NCAA Division I-AAA, Division II, and Division III member institutions. Since Title IX was applicable and enforceable across all divisions and subdivisions, it can't be the cause of elimination of those men's teams programs at the upper division institutions only. A subsequent reason, which is often overlooked in public discourse and media, is the spending attributed to various upper division athletic teams. From 1992-1997, for Division I-A institutions, women's athletic programs increased their spending on recruiting activities, coaching salaries, and scholarships, by \$400,230 over that five-year period

(Sabo, 1998). Men's athletic programs in Division I-A, however, increased spending by \$1.37 million- and 63% of that increase in spending, approximately \$872,000, went to football programs (Sabo, 1998). Further research demonstrated that if football scholarships were cut from 85 full-ride scholarships to 60, it would save colleges and universities close to \$750,000, which would finance two (male) wrestling teams for that institution (which on average cost \$330,000 annually) (Simon, 2005). Thus, previously research has demonstrated that the public perception of Title IX legislation has led to the demise of men's athletic team programs is not entirely accurate.

Female Student-Athletes

Participation numbers cannot fully describe the lived experiences of female student-athletes, but they do point to a trend that highlights increased opportunities for participation for women. In addition to previously stated data in regards to the number of female student-athletes tripling after the implementation of Title IX, more recent studies point to increased opportunities for women. Across Division I, all subdivisions, there were 240.9 male student-athletes and 158 female student-athletes per institution for the 1997-1998 academic year (NCAA, 1999). In contrast, for the 2015-2016 academic year, for Division I institutions there were on average 279.1 male student-athletes per institution and 243.2 female student-athletes per institution (NCAA, 2016). This somehow was a trend for upper level institutions only. For Division III colleges and universities, the average number of male student-athletes per institution was 198.6 and for female student-athletes it was 132.1, for the 1997-1998 (NCAA, 1999). Over the 2015-2016 academic year, those numbers have changed to 248.8 male student-athletes per institutions and 191.3 female student-athletes (NCAA, 2016). This disparity in Division I and Division III participation numbers may be in part due to increased focus, whether intentional or not, to

combat the immense size of the rosters for football programs in the Division I-A subdivision (Sabo, 1998).

Despite the historical advancements due to Title IX, male and female student-athletes have yet to stand on equal ground. Even internal NCAA investigations have revealed data that at Division I-A institutions, men's athletic team programs receive 70% of the funding allocated to athletic scholarships, 77% of the operating budget, and 83% of the funding dedicated to recruiting (Salter, 1996). At several Division I institutions, across all subdivisions, there are as many female student-athletes on all teams as there are male student-athletes on the football team (Salter, 1996). The NCAA has made accommodations to combat this trend, adding *emerging sports for women* as one of the focus areas under the 2010-established NCAA Office of Inclusion and Diversity. The purpose behind such a focus area is an attempt to uphold the substantial proportionality clause of the three-prong Title IX compliance test, which translates to the addition of female sports that would attract already talented athletes to intercollegiate athletic teams. Substantial proportionality has received positive and negative feedback from university administrators and the general public. Salter addressed the increased attention on female student-athlete participation numbers and focus on gender equality in the 1990's with the statement:

Sports are a microcosm of society, in that many, if not all, of the attributes required to compete and be successful in the athletic arena are prerequisites for basic survival. Whether it is in business, law, or medicine, people need the skills to work as a team, to be able to function effectively under pressure, and to exhibit simpler traits like responsibility and discipline. Are these characteristics not as important for our daughters to learn at they are for our sons? (Salter, 1996)

Outside of revenue generation, athletic department spending allocations, and data surrounding participation substantial proportionality, the legality of Title IX did help to advance the goal of educational equity in regards to gender. While Title IX compliant institutions are lacking and allocation of funding is far from proportional, the participation numbers and trends in gender equity point to promising advancements made for women in participating in intercollegiate athletics.

Transgender Student-Athletes

While Title IX mandated equal representation based on gender, the assumption under the legislation at the time was that the policy referred to gender assigned at birth. In 1972, gender expression was not formally considered a stance that needed to be protected. With transgender rights in the forefront of national media and politics in recent years, athletic organizations have tried and often failed at how to navigate athletes' needs while not being discriminatory or invasive. Researchers from the Stanford Law and Policy Review have stated that sex and gender roles in sports, and subsequent eligibility, have stemmed from negative and inaccurate stereotypes as opposed to scientific facts and analytical thinking (Stanz & Luckinbill, 2015). These stereotypes have created policies and obscure tests that violate privacy, science, and medicine. While many of these battles have been contested on the international stage, attitudes towards transgender athletes trickle down to the intercollegiate level. The policies being created and implemented are in much more recent history than the Educational Amendments of 1972 due to the more recent visibility of the transgender student-athlete population. The first openly transgender student-athlete on a NCAA Division I athletics team was Kye Allums, a transgender man who played on the women's basketball team at George Washington University and only came out publicly in 2010 (Thomas, 2010).

Transgender College Student Experience. Transgender college students, including transgender student-athletes, face a unique and often challenging post-secondary experience. While college aims to be an inclusive, tolerant, and progressive environment, that may not always be the case. Transgender students have a tendency to feel isolated and cut off from their peers, and often feel marginalized and/or oppressed at the majority of institutions across the United States (Beemyn, 2005). Institutions in the United States are still structured in ways that promote and/or reinforce the gender binary, from campus culture and socially constructed barriers to physical barriers like facilities and policies. There are many ways transgender college students feel marginalized on their college campuses, from gendered bathrooms to not being able to change their name on official university documentation and records. Historically from a policy standpoint, transgender students are often denied the medical or psychological care needed to transition to the extent they desire. Just in 2004, the precedent was set by the University of California system when administrators changed their student insurance policy to include hormone therapy, psychotherapy, and gender reassignment surgeries for staff and students (Beemyn, 2005). The discrimination has extended to housing, where students are often lost searching for on-campus housing options that respect and validate their gender identity. On-campus housing options should feel safe and comfortable for students, which have led to gender inclusive housing initiatives at a number of institutions such as Wesleyan University, Sarah Lawrence College, and the University of Vermont (Beemyn, 2005). Outside of on-campus housing options, universities have been doing a much better job at promoting gender-neutral or private bathrooms across college campuses (Beemyn, 2005). Bathrooms and transgender rights have been in the national spotlight recently due to discriminatory legislation proposed in North Carolina and Texas, as individuals who have a gender identity that differs from the one they

were assigned at birth are “vulnerable to harassment and violence when using restrooms designated for ‘women’ and ‘men’” (Beemyn, 2005, p. 81).

Perhaps the most intimidating institutional setting for transgender students is the locker room. The experience of utilizing locker rooms can cause such stress for transgender students that many refuse to take any physical education classes and choose to not take advantage of campus recreation facilities, despite paying for them with student fees (Beemyn, 2005). The locker room situation can be uncomfortable to dangerous as the physical space provides an opportunity to unintentionally out the student by being naked around their peers. Universities have made an attempt to combat this concern by offering more private locker room facilities. University administrators have been able to promote these spaces to not only their transgender students, but also to students who may have children or people with disabilities that may require additional care from someone who may have a different gender identity than them (Case, 2012).

Transgender Athletes and the IOC. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has been the highest organization implementing policies surrounding athletics for decades. The IOC required gender verification tests, through a number of different means, from the 1968 Olympiad through the 1998 Olympiad (Stanz & Luckinbill, 2015). The practice was abandoned due to the lack of scientific evidence citing that the gender verification tests proved anything or were necessary. In 2003, the IOC adopted what was referred to as the Stockholm Consensus. The Stockholm Consensus outlined rules and regulations that dictated what teams and events transgender athletes could participate in (Stanz & Luckinbill, 2015). At the IOC Convention prior to the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Summer Olympic Games, the IOC revisited the Consensus in attempt to align with science as opposed to stereotypes. The revamped policies however still dictated certain rules with no research background, such as needing to have been publicly

identifying as a woman for the four years prior to competing at the Olympic Games in question (Stanz & Luckinbill, 2015). Many other athletic associations have adopted the IOC rules on male-to-female athlete and female-to-male competitive eligibility rules, including the International Association of Athletics Federation (IAAF), the United States Tennis Association (USTA), and the NCAA.

Transgender Student-Athletes in the NCAA. As of the *2004-2010 NCAA Gender Equity Report*, the NCAA has not kept track of exact numbers of transgender athletes competing in intercollegiate athletics. Even in the *2015-2016 NCAA Sport Sponsorship and Participation Rates Report*, student-athlete were only given two choices for gender demographics (male, female). There is a lack of scholarly data to analyze trends in transgender student-athlete participation. In 2011, the NCAA Office of Inclusion issued the *NCAA Inclusion of Transgender Athletes*. In this report, the association stated that “the assumption that all male-bodied people are taller, stronger, and more highly skilled in a sport than all female-bodied people is not accurate” (NCAA, 2011, p. 7). This demonstrates progress in efforts toward a more inclusive athletics environment, however as the NCAA has seen with female participation in athletics progress does not mean equitable or just. While the 2011 report by the NCAA stresses the importance of not “over-generalizing” differences between male and female athletic potential, the rules state otherwise by banning male-to-female transgender athletes from participating in women’s athletics prior to completing a year of testosterone-suppression therapy (Stanz & Luckinbill, 2015).

Policy Review

For this study, prior and in addition to interviews with participants, I summarized the rhetoric behind NCAA policies in regards to gender, inclusivity, and policy implementation. The

goal was to identify what policies exist and to what extent they support the student-athlete experience for individuals who have marginalized gender identities. These policies will be referenced in the interviews with participants, as a way to gauge awareness and practical application of said bylaws. The NCAA has published three separate documents that serve as the building blocks for institutions to create inclusive environments for their student-athletes: *Equity and Title IX in Intercollegiate Athletics*, *Gender Equity Planning Best Practices*, and the *NCAA Inclusion of Transgender Student-Athletes*. These documents provide the framework for gender equity policies within the NCAA and for member institutions.

Equity and Title IX in Intercollegiate Athletics. In 2011, the NCAA published the *Equity and Title IX in Intercollegiate Athletics - A Practical Guide for Colleges and Universities*. Originally published in 1994, the manual and subsequent revisions exist to help institutions interpret the laws surrounding gender equity to ensure fair opportunities. The sections covered include recognizing sources of law, interpreting Title IX compliance, NCAA specific concerns, harassment and harassment prevention, employment legislation, case law, and how to create appropriate gender equity plans. The 133 page document provides clear descriptions of relevant policies for NCAA institutions. The manual provides clear recommendations for Title IX accommodations including:

- Provision and Maintenance of Equipment and Supplies
- Scheduling of Games and Practice Time
- Travel and Per Diem Allowance
- Opportunity to Receive Academic Tutoring, Assignment and Compensation of Tutors
- Opportunity to Receive Coaching, Assignment and Compensation of Coaches
- Provision of Locker Rooms, Practice and Competitive Facilities

- Provision of Medical and Athletic Training Facilities and Services
- Provision of Housing and Dining Facilities and Services
- Publicity
- Support services
- Recruiting
- Other issues (Fundraising, Tiering, Pregnancy) (Judge & O'Brien, 2011)

These accommodations are all aspects of the student-athlete experience that can be quantified. These accommodations can all be worked into gender equity inclusion plans to ensure equal opportunity.

Inclusion Plans. Having a gender equity or inclusion plan is not something that is required by any federal rule or regulation. While not legally mandated, the authors highlight how beneficial having a plan like this could be. Inclusion plans should be set up like any other departmental strategic planning initiative, and should include the issues of concerns, goals for improvement, timeline, and person/department responsible for facilitating change. The recommendation for having such plans in place led the NCAA to publish another document on the subject: *Gender Equity Planning Best Practices*, published by the NCAA, that outlines more specific ways institutions can create fair and equitable environments.

Gender Equity Planning Best Practices. As mentioned in the previous section, the recommendation for a gender equity and inclusion plan from the NCAA was so strong that they created an entire additional document to highlight the best practices involved with creating that gender equity and inclusion plan. The NCAA stresses that before even beginning to create your institutions plan, one needs to be able to understand Title IX requirements and compliance. Gender equity plans are also best created as a proactive measure. It is more effective for an

institution to have documents already written prior to any complaints the athletic department may or may not receive.

Gender equity plans are most effective when the focus areas are “education, communication, and commitment” (NCAA, 2011, p.2). Athletic departments need to educate themselves with current Title IX and gender equity information, provide relevant education to student-athletes, continuously evaluate current programming for equity concerns, treat gender equity as a high priority within the department, and establish a diverse gender equity committee. The benefits of establishing a diverse gender equity committee include allowing a variety of experiences to objectively evaluate current programs and goals, allows athletic departments to bring in experts from across the institution (like the Title IX coordinator and university legal boards), and provide opportunities for committee members to monitor current goals and initiatives.

Creating a gender equity plan should include all aspects of an athletic program including but not limited to equipment and supplies, scheduling of contests and practice times, and academic support services. Even if no issues are identified within that program area, a maintenance plan should be put in place. Each program area should also identify clear processes to achieve program area goals, the person responsible for the implementation of change, and specific deadlines. Here is an example from a hypothetical gender equity plan:

Elements			Steps		
Program Area	Issue(s)	Measurable Goals	Steps Needed	Individuals Responsible	Specific Timeline
Travel Allowance	No issues identified within program area. Maintenance plan included.	Provide equitable modes of transportation during travel, length of stay before and after	Assign to Gender Equity Committee the responsibility of annually reviewing and modifying as needed the written	Gender Equity Committee, Director of Athletics, Senior Woman Administrator,	Beginning in 2010 and annually thereafter.

		competitions, dining and per diem allowances.	policies, procedures and criteria for travel arrangements and per diem allowances.	Athletics Business Manager	
Academic Support Services	Lack of academic support services for women's track and field and women's volleyball.	Hire two new graduate assistants to work in the academic support services department. The two new academic counselors will assist women's track and field and women's volleyball.	2010-11: Raise funds necessary for two new academic counselor positions and director of academic services. 2011-12: Hire all three positions and begin reassignments within academic support services.	Senior Associate Director of Athletics for Internal Affairs.	Beginning in 2010 and annually thereafter.

(NCAA, 2009).

NCAA Inclusion of Transgender Student-Athletes

The *NCAA Inclusion of Transgender Student-Athletes* publication was created to educate institutions and administrators on the accommodations and needs of transgender student-athletes. This resource provided specific recommendations for best practices, and also guidance on how to implement new policies to ensure the “safety, privacy, and dignity” of transgender student-athletes (Carroll & Griffin, 2011, p. 2). The document was written based on the current medical and legal knowledge at the time, but recognized that transgender student-athletes were an emerging population the document may require editing in the future. The authors included Dr. Pat Griffin, professor in the Social Justice Education program at the University of Massachusetts, Director of Changing the Game: The Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network, and former college coach, and Helen Carroll, Director for the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR) Sports Project, former college coach, and former collegiate athletic director. The authors also consulted with three different physicians to interpret the medical complexities of the transitioning transgender student-athletes, various legal organizations to review the legal rights

of transgender individuals, and several current and former transgender student-athletes who shared their stories. The resulting publication provided rich details for how to accommodate transgender student-athletes in appropriate and celebratory ways. The authors of the publication also debunk several myths surrounding the concerns of competitive equity. The experts discuss how for transgender women, if transition is begun early enough, transgender women do not experience a male puberty (Carroll & Griffin, 2011). The experts also highlight the natural physical variation in women and men, both transgender and non-transgender (Carroll & Griffin, 2011). The authors noted “It is important not to overgeneralize...The assumption that all male-bodied people are taller, stronger and more highly skilled in a sport than all female-bodied people is not accurate” (Carroll & Griffin, 2011, p. 7).

Policy Recommendations for Including Transgender Student-Athletes. Within the best practices publication, the authors refer to a list of “Guiding Principles” that all institutions should attempt to abide by. These principles provide a framework and a foundation for institutions to create policy that is appropriate, inclusive, and based off of knowledge sources as opposed to inaccurate stereotypes. The following guiding principles, compiled directly from the report include:

1. Intercollegiate athletics participation should be considered an important aspect of the college experience for all students.
2. There should be equal opportunity for all students to participate, both for transgender and non-transgender students.
3. Women’s athletic programs should have their integrity maintained throughout policy decision-making.

4. Policy development will be based upon the most recent medical and scientific data available to the institution.
5. Policies surrounding athletic programs should be practical, enforceable, and objective, as well as written down and available to the public.
6. Policies should take into account the natural physical variation of physical size and strength in order to maintain fairness.
7. Privacy of the student-athlete is of the utmost importance and should be maintained at all costs.
8. The medical privacy of the student-athlete should also be maintained at all costs.
9. The athletic department in question should provide accurate and appropriate educational resources for student-athletes, parents, staff, and coaches in regards to the participation of transgender student-athletes.
10. All policies created and enforced regarding the inclusion of transgender student-athletes should comply with state and federal laws. (Carroll & O'Brien, 2011).

Outside of specific recommendations for practice, two additional areas of NCAA regulations can be impacted by transgender student-athlete participation: use of banned substances and mixed team status. A mixed team is a varsity intercollegiate sports team on which at least one individual of each gender competes (NCAA, 2017). These two areas of NCAA regulations are designed to directly address concerns about competition equity among transgender student-athletes.

The use of banned substances is a concern across the NCAA for all student-athletes. Testosterone is primarily the substance in question when it comes to student-athletes use and conduct. NCAA Bylaw 31.2.3 identifies testosterone as a banned substance, and provides for a

medical exception review for demonstrated need for use of a banned medication. It is the responsibility of the NCAA institution to submit the request for a medical exception (see www.ncaa.org/drugtesting) for testosterone treatment prior to the student-athlete competing while undergoing treatment. In the case of testosterone suppression, the institution must submit written documentation to the NCAA of the year of treatment and ongoing monitoring of testosterone suppression (NCAA, 2017).

NCAA Policy on Transgender Student-Athlete Inclusion. Within the larger document itself, the NCAA does have guidelines for how they determine inclusion practices for transgender student-athletes. The following policies clarify participation of transgender student-athletes undergoing hormonal treatment for gender transition:

1. A trans male (FTM) student-athlete who has received a medical exception for treatment with testosterone for NCAA competition may compete on a men's team, but is no longer eligible to compete on a women's team without the institution changing that team status to a mixed team.
 2. A trans female (MTF) student-athlete being treated with testosterone suppression medication for NCAA competition may continue to compete on a men's team but may not compete on a women's team without changing it to a mixed team status until completing one calendar year of testosterone suppression treatment.
 3. Any transgender student-athlete who is not taking hormone treatment related to gender transition may participate in sex-separated sports activities in accordance with his or her assigned birth gender.
- A trans male (FTM) student-athlete who is not taking testosterone related to gender transition may participate on a men's or women's team.

- A trans female (MTF) transgender student-athlete who is not taking hormone treatments related to gender transition may not compete on a women's team. (NCAA, 2017)

These policies and regulations are designed to address competitive equity, updated medical research, and aims to respect gender identity while preserving the integrity of women's athletic teams, as mentioned previously in the document's principles. Whether or not institutions have additional accommodations in place for transgender student-athletes, the above policies are what institutions are expected to follow in regards to participation and inclusion.

Gaps in the Literature

There are several gaps in the literature in regards to marginalized gender and gender identities in the NCAA. There is an abundance of literature published on Title IX and its subsequent effect over the last 45 years but only recently has gender expression been addressed as opposed to gender assigned at birth. In regards to cisgender female participation in sport, there is sufficient data on participation rates and the increases in female college athletes' participation in athletics over the last 45 years. What is lacking in the research is qualitative studies examining the lived experiences of these female student-athletes, analyzing if their needs are being met despite the disparity in spending across male and female athletics. Additionally, further research would be necessary to determine the differences between Division I-A institutions and Division III institutions, specifically in regards to why participation for females has increased at an exponential rate for Division I-A as opposed to Division III. While as researchers we can hypothesis that this is due to swelling football rosters and subsequent budgets, further research is needed to confirm from both a quantitative and qualitative standpoint.

There are also several gaps in the literature that address campus climate and campus culture for women. While limited studies exist on specific sub-populations, like women faculty or women of marginalized racial and ethnic groups, little research has been done to explore the lived experiences of women student-athletes. It seems in general qualitative research is lacking, and most of the data surrounding women on college campuses has to do with the increase in numbers over the past 50 years.

The largest gap in the literature is research on transgender student-athletes in the NCAA. While we have an abundance of data of cisgender female participation rates, transgender student-athletes numbers are unknown. We know very little about student-athletes that are participating on teams that are different than their gender assigned at birth, much less on student-athletes who have are unable to participate on the team that aligns with their gender expression due to unfair and discriminatory policies. While basic numerical data would be a minimum, qualitative research on their lived experiences is non-existent.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to analyze how NCAA policy affects the lived experiences of student-athletes with marginalized gender identities. Historically as an organization the NCAA was set up to serve male student-athletes and men's athletic teams and programs. This study aimed to educate student affairs professionals, higher education administrators, and those who work in athletic administration how to better serve student-athletes with marginalized gender identities. The design of the study sought to explore whether or not student-athletes with marginalized gender identities feel their needs are being met in terms of how their institution and athletic governing body supports their gender identities.

This study is important because it responds to the research that points out efforts surrounding diversity and inclusion have yet to create a fair and equitable environment within the NCAA for athletes with marginalized gender identities. Participants in this study were student-athletes of marginalized genders or gender identities, all of whom identified as cisgender women. The study was open to cisgender women student-athletes, transgender male and female student-athletes, and non-binary student-athletes.

Rationale

Gender equity within NCAA athletic programs is far from equitable. Despite significant advancements in women's college sports over the past 45 years, advantages for men's athletic programs are still significant. In all areas of athletic departments, from grant-in-aid full-ride scholarships, to coaching salaries, to facilities and equipment, and to recruiting costs, men's athletic teams and programs have a significant advantage over women's programs. While Title

IX was implemented to combat these disadvantages (Shaw, 1995), and progress has been made, there is clearly more work to be done on what policies and regulations are needed to better serve the female student-athlete population and how existing policies and procedures can be more effectively implemented.

Paradigm

For the purposes of this study, as a researcher I approached the research process with a constructivist paradigm and viewpoint. This paradigm reflects the belief that lived experiences shape how we perceive the world, and that those lived experiences and subsequent interpretation differ between individuals (Mertens, 2010). The constructivist paradigm states that there is not one true body of knowledge or framework that everyone can use to interpret the world. The perception that “reality is socially constructed” (Mertens, 2010, p. 16) supports this researcher’s framework that the NCAA is a system/organization that is designed to promote amateur athleticism, however not always to benefit of the student-athletes in question, The constructivist paradigm also supports how participants have made meaning of their student-athlete experiences. Their day-to-day lived experiences have informed how they interpret the world and how they’ve constructed their reality.

This paradigm is consistent with Merriam’s explanation of the primary goal of qualitative research: “qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2016, p. 6). The constructivist paradigm and qualitative research method forms an interpretive type mindset, which allows the researcher to recognize that there is not one truth to search for as all participants will have their own individual truths. This lets us acknowledge that lived experiences contribute to how someone makes sense of the world as

opposed to one right or wrong stance on objective issues. Therefore, a qualitative research design was most appropriate for this study because it allowed for the experiences themselves and the data from participants to inform the findings. There is no stance of right or wrong answers within the findings and discussion of said findings, but rather a summary, interpretation, and analysis of how policy shaped the lived experiences of student-athletes.

Research Questions

Several research questions were developed to address the purpose of this study focusing on the lived experiences of student-athletes with marginalized gender identities:

1. According to the lived experience of participants, how effective are NCAA policies and recommendations for practice at supporting female student-athletes in regards to their academic and athletic goals?
2. To what extent do NCAA policies and recommendations for practice help to facilitate an inclusive environment for female student-athletes?
3. How can educators adapt policy to better fit the lived student-athlete experience for women?

These questions were designed in an attempt to focus on how public policy affects lived experiences in the case of student-athletes in the NCAA. Policy has consequences on culture, attitudes, and public opinion, and can have a tremendous impact on student-athletes and their gender identities that have been historically, and currently, been marginalized.

Participants

Identities. The participants recruited for this study fell into the category of individuals who do not identify as cisgender male. The four participants for this study identified as cisgender women who all were student-athletes at Division I institutions. I chose to not take into account

sexuality for the purposes of this study, although further research on the experiences of LGBTQA student-athletes is needed in the field in general. I placed no limitations on NCAA Division, sport, conference, year enrolled, or other restrictive aspects of identities. Complete participant profiles are available in Chapter Four – Findings.

Recruitment. Participants for this study were recruited a number of different ways. Upon receiving IRB approval (see Appendix A), my contact information and subsequent information about this study were distributed through contacts obtained within certain institutions and the NASPA Student-Athlete Knowledge Community. Additionally, I contacted activists in the gender equity community who work closely with college student-athletes and asked them to share my information on their platforms. The information shared included contact information for the primary and secondary researcher, all informed consent information (to be later confirmed verbally if the potential participant chose to participate in the study), and then a password-protected Google Form that affirmed their informed consent as well as collect contact information and personal demographic information (see Appendix B). The recruitment strategies resulted in four cisgender female participants agreeing to participate in the study.

Data Collection

Data was collected by the primary researcher through two semi-structured interviews with each participant. The length of the interviews ranged between 23 and 48 minutes. Interviews were audio recorded on the primary researcher's password-protected iPhone to ensure quality interview recordings for transcription.

Interviews. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, which allowed for participants to elaborate on their lived experiences as women college student athletes. Interviews highlight a key benefit of qualitative research, which is that interpretive research allows “the

researcher to be the primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (Merriam, 2016, p. 16). That is, the researcher is able to adapt and react in response to participant engagement. This allows the data, which in this case was the interview recording, to be clarified, summarized, and followed by additional questions to ensure understanding.

Interviews were conducted over Skype and/or FaceTime, depending on which technology was available. Interviews were semi-structured with a conversation like tone that allowed the participants to direct the conversation to the areas of their student-athlete experience that they deemed the most important to discuss. While the researcher had research questions to address as a general objective, this style of interviewing allowed for flexibility in topics discussed. Before the researcher began with the interview questions, background information was offered about my identities and previous personal involvement within the NCAA to establish rapport. Background information was also provided on the purposes of the study, the research completed at this point, and the planned timeline for research going forward. There was a deliberate attempt to develop rapport with the participants through the introductions and first question during the interview, which led to more open and honest conversations. Additionally, interview rapport was made easier due to shared terminology from shared student-athlete experiences. The initial interview was guided by an interview protocol that was created to address the purpose of the study and the research questions. See Appendix D for the interview protocol.

Using a semi structured interview format conducted in real time allowed the data to be full of detail one may not be able to obtain from a survey instrument. Interviewing has been described as a way to obtain data from phenomena we cannot immediately observe. This includes thoughts, feelings, intentions, and previous experiences that may not be possible to re-

enact (Merriam, 2016). By paying attention to nonverbal communication and body language, the researcher was able to tailor follow up questions and appropriate responses to the participant's answers to the previous questions.

Each participant took part in two interviews each. This was completed intentionally, allowing the interviewee to review policies provided after the first interview. After the first interview, participants were provided with the three publications from the NCAA that were discussed in Chapter Two – Literature Review, including the *Equity and Title IX and Intercollegiate Athletics* publication, the *Gender Equity Planning Best Practices* document and subsequent *Sample Gender Equity Plan*, and the *NCAA Inclusion of Transgender Student-Athletes* publication. Participants were asked to look at the documents and publications, as the interview questions in the second interview were more focused on their opinions and reactions to those documents. This way of structuring interviews and policy education was intentional, in order to learn more about their lived experiences first and their reactions and/or knowledge of gender equity policies second.

Interview Transcription. The researcher transcribed audio recordings from each interview verbatim, soon after the interview was completed. The transcriptions were then sent to participants asking them to check for accuracy. Only one participant identified edits to their transcription. The shortest amount of time the interview transcription and subsequent email took was one day, and the longest was five, with the most common timeline being three days.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process was a way to interpret participants' lived experiences as college student athletes based on data collected during the interviews. The first step in my data analysis was the collection of data itself, in the form of audio recording each interview, which were

transcribed verbatim. According to Maxwell, the “experienced qualitative researcher begins data analysis immediately after finishing the first interview or observation, and continues to analyze the data as long as he or she is working on the research” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 104). This data analysis strategy was helpful in terms of productivity levels and accelerating the writing process as opposed to letting interviews pile up.

Once interviews were transcribed, I utilized an open coding process for data analysis. Open coding is the process of letting themes emerge from the data naturally by treating the data as answers to the open-ended research questions (Maxwell, 2013). Upon reading the data and listening to the interviews, coding categories were developed based on what the participants focused on and highlighted as important in their responses. Based on my prior knowledge base of the NCAA environment, I could have brainstormed pre-established categories, but as a researcher it was more beneficial to decide on the categories while centering the data from participants. These categories can be referred to as *substantive* categories, or ones that “explicitly identify the content of the person’s statement or action- what they actually did or meant” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 107). These categories are considered descriptive, coming directly from participant responses and do not adhere to a specific theory.

In addition to utilizing an open-coding model, I wrote several memos for my own reflective purposes. While these memos may not have directly contributed to the findings of my study, they served the purpose of allowing me to express my own thoughts on the interview process, ideas on how to improve the interviews or my writing, tentative categories, and/or other reflections on the data. Additionally, these memos helped to form an audit trail. An audit trail is defined as a transparent description of the research steps taken, including the raw data, notes on

the data analysis process, personal notes, notes from during the interviews, and all drafts of each chapter (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

After using an open coding model to let themes develop naturally, I shifted to an axial coding (or analytical coding) model in order to dive deeper into the organically emerging themes. Axial coding is the process grouping the open codes into categories that reflect on the deeper meaning of the data (Merriam, 2016). This utilization of open coding and subsequent axial coding took form in several ways. First, I went through all of the interview transcriptions highlighting quotes and experiences that spoke to different aspects of this study: experiences based off of gender, knowledge of policy, or opinions on athletic administration. This process became very analytical in nature, and included an analysis of 47 single-spaced pages of transcripts. Then, I used mind-mapping techniques to visually interpret the items or experiences that I believed were emerging as themes but weren't developed or supported enough to be classified as themes. This resulted in two poster-board sized Post-It notes up on the wall of my apartment filled with hunches on what themes were developing from my own written memos and the color-coded transcriptions. From the mind mapping process I used an additional color-coding process to identify main themes and subsequent sub-themes. The data analysis process was something I became fully immersed in to be able to be fully confident in the themes I ended up writing in Chapter Four – Findings. By fully immersed, I am referring to the depth of my analysis of the data by revisiting the transcriptions, creating draft themes and sub themes, and re-color coding all the transcriptions to ensure I had the data and quotes to support the final themes. After all the various stages of mind mapping and color-coding, three primary themes emerged from the data analysis process. Those three themes and related sub-themes will be described in detail in Chapter Four.

Trustworthiness

Several strategies were utilized to ensure the trustworthiness of this study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) highlight several key components to a study that help to establish trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. Each component illustrates several key aspects or examples of trustworthiness in this research.

Credibility is referred to as the confidence that results from the truth found in the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Several techniques were utilized to help ensure credibility: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, member checking, and peer debriefing. Prolong engagement manifested itself in a number of ways. First, my positionality as a researcher meant I have either existed within the NCAA or had an increased knowledge of the NCAA through observation for the past eight years. This helped to influence my interview protocol, policies chosen address, and a shared language with participants. Additionally, prolonged engagement was strengthened through the use of two interviews and establishing rapport with the participants. I had an established relationship with two of the participants in this study and a professional relationship with another, which made establishing rapport easier. This prolonged engagement supported the trustworthiness of my study by increasing the depth of my relationships with participants allowing our interviews to fully explore their lived experiences and how they made meaning of their time as student-athletes.

Persistent observation spoke to my ability to decipher what in the interview protocol was important and what to follow up on within the semi-structured interviews with participants. Persistent observation allowed me to identify the important points in the conversations, “that are most relevant in the problem or issue being pursued and focusing on them in detail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Revisiting the data a number of different times, either through listening to the

transcriptions again from the audio recordings, re-reading the interview transcriptions, or revisiting my mind mapping processes from the data analysis section, helped to support the credibility of my research findings.

Member checking was utilized in my study to ensure the accuracy of my findings with the participants. Member checking as a process is when data is tested with members of the groups from whom the data was provided by (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For my study, this resulted in the formal process of sending participants their interview transcriptions immediately upon completion. This allowed participants to read through our conversation and edit, elaborate, or ask me to remove certain parts of the transcription. Additionally, the findings were presented to participants to read through to ensure what the themes that emerged from the data aligned with their lived experiences and their perceptions of the interview protocol. This gave participants an opportunity to challenge the interpretations made from the data, and to give them the opportunity to analyze the ways I protected identities (i.e., changing names, institutions, sports, and removing identifying information from quotations) I did not receive any responses from participants.

Peer debriefing is "a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytical sessions and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308) I utilized peer debriefing as a method to ensure trustworthiness allowed me as the primary research to discuss the research process with the secondary researcher. These meetings were held regularly throughout the summer and fall of 2017, and weekly in the spring of 2018. These meetings allowed the primary researcher to ask questions about the data analysis process, seek feedback on chapters and themes, and check my own biases in regards to the data. These

meetings also provided a form of support and encouragement that felt necessary when the data felt overwhelming.

Transferability is typically used in relation to qualitative research, describing data that came from a certain population to be representative of the general population in which generalizations and limitations apply to both the sample and overall population (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba recognized the overall goal of qualitative research is not generalizability and thus not impacting the trustworthiness of this study, states that transferability can be achieved through providing a strong analysis of the population in question. My prolonged engagement, detailed data analysis process, and rich and thick description of the research process and thematic findings strengthened the transferability of this study.

As with peer debriefing, the secondary researcher also provided immense support when it came to the dependability of this study. Dependability in qualitative research refers to allowing an external person or persons provide guidance on the research design or process to ensure the findings are supported by the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The amount of dependability I was able to place on the secondary researcher as a sounding board increased the trustworthiness of my study by providing opportunities to receive feedback on the research design, process, and summary.

Confirmability refers to the ability of the primary researcher to provide evidence that the study in question was conducted with the appropriate research design, methodology, and processes, as well as ensuring that the findings were plausible based on the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability also refers to the extent that the primary researcher was able to manage their own biases and reflexivity throughout the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As mentioned previously, I utilized an audit trail of memos that reflected the emotions I

experienced throughout the research process. The amount of evidence I was able to provide that this study was conducted in a detailed, intentional way speaks to the trustworthiness of the research and subsequent findings.

Positionality

As a researcher, I recognized how my own identities and history influenced how I perceive the NCAA in both a positive and negative light. As a former student-athlete, I was involved in NCAA Division 1-A athletics as an white, heterosexual, cisgender, international, female student-athlete in a non-revenue generating sport. I competed for the University of Iowa as a springboard and platform diver from 2010 through 2015, earning my Bachelor's of Arts in Ethics and Public Policy and a Bachelor's of Science in Recreation and Sport Management (with a focus in Sport and Diversity). Many of those identities led to privilege within the athletic community, while others did not have similar privileges. I sincerely enjoyed my experience as a student-athlete, and had the privilege to travel the country with teammates who became my close friends. I attended the Big Ten Championships and the NCAA Zone Championships every year I was eligible (as I sat out the 2013-2014 competitive season to extend eligibility), and was able to fully immerse myself in the experience of being a Division I student-athlete (including strength training, athletic training, nutrition consultations, sports psychology, and gear sponsorships). The primary contribution my personal experience made towards this study was an already established knowledge base of the terminology surrounding the NCAA community and organization. Additionally, as one of my identities was being an international student-athlete, I grew up outside of the system that incorporated Title IX into their education system. I believe this allowed me to interpret the legislation with a viewpoint that was free of bias, both positive and negative, until my undergraduate college career. While I have little personal experience with the educational

amendment through primary school, I benefited from Title IX as a partial grant-in-aid scholarship recipient at an NCAA Division I-A institution, signing my National Letter of Intent in October of 2009.

Throughout this research process, my positionality and past experiences as a student-athlete and as a woman affected me in small but impactful ways. My student-athlete experience allowed me to build rapport with participants quickly, and allowed us to utilize a shared language when it came to discussing athletic department structure or NCAA compliance policies. I was able to empathize with time commitment or injury concerns, and share in the joy of developing close personal relationships. My biases in this case resulted in increased familiarity, helping the interviews flow, which improved the depth of the conversations I had with participants.

While I recognize my biases and belief systems surrounding the NCAA system may not directly affect the outcome of this research, I utilized several strategies to manage the privilege I have, and continue to have, as a female student-athlete who received a partial scholarship. As opposed to relying on personal experience at the Big Ten, Division I-A level, I made an effort to include historical data across divisions and conferences within the NCAA. I tried to refrain from adding personal opinion when analyzing data and policy surrounding gender equity, or researching about the unintended implications of Title IX, as I recognize my own experiences are not equivalent to the experiences of all female student-athletes. All data and definitions surrounding NCAA structure and terminology were cited from peer-reviewed sources, as opposed to coming from my own knowledge base. Additionally, I used member-checking techniques to address whether or not my interpretations of the data aligned with the student-athlete experiences participants were intending to convey. My thesis advisor has reviewed all drafts of this thesis, which helped me identify my biases, and how my personal identities and

experiences may have influenced the outcome of this study. I recognize my own experiences and potential biases may impact how I have analyzed the data and subsequent findings, but by utilizing my resources including member checking and my advisor, I feel confident those biases were managed appropriately.

Conclusion

This qualitative study was designed and executed with the purpose of exploring the participants lived experiences as student-athletes with marginalized gender identities. By framing the study through a constructivist paradigm, I allowed their reality to emerge as something that is socially constructed. Four participants were willing to share their experiences, and each was able to commit to two interviews each, totaling over five hours of recorded interviews. Interviews were transcribed by the primary researcher and served a greater purpose in the data analysis stage. An open coding and axial coding process was used to interpret the data, which also included mind mapping and color-coding techniques of organizing the data that was emerging from the data. The Institutional Review Board at the University of Nebraska- Lincoln approved the entire interview process and protocol. In the next chapter, I explore the findings of the interviews conducted and separate the findings by themes. These themes seek to answer the open-ended research questions presented to fulfill the purpose of this study, and allow the participants to illustrate their student-athlete experience.

Chapter Four

Findings

Introduction

The purpose this study was to examine how NCAA policy plays a role in the everyday lived experiences of student-athletes who do not identify as male. The study examined a number of legislative policies, NCAA policies, and NCAA publications available to the public for both the literature review and during the interview process. While studying the impact of Title IX on number and participation rates within the NCAA is not a new area of research, looking at the lived experiences of non-male student-athletes from a qualitative perspective is largely unexplored. The four participants I recruited for this study possess a variety of social identities and student-athlete experiences, but they have several traits in common (including NCAA Division and student-athlete experiences). For the purposes of this study, I developed three research questions that spoke to the effect public policy has on the lived experiences of student-athletes who identify as women. The three research questions were:

1. According to the lived experience of participants, how effective are NCAA policies and recommendations for practice at supporting female student-athletes in regards to their academic and athletic goals?
2. To what extent do NCAA policies and recommendations for practice help to facilitate an inclusive environment for female student-athletes?
3. How can educators adapt policy to better fit the lived student-athlete experience for women?

Three primary themes emerged from the data collected during my interviews with participants. Over the course of several weeks, I was able to complete eight interviews; two each

with four participants for a total of over five hours of interviews. The insight I was able to gain from the information shared about participants' lived experiences was analyzed and three themes emerged that spoke to how participants felt policy affected their day-to-day experiences, including the culture of their institution, their environment, their social identities, and how they felt overall about their time as Division One student-athletes.

Participant Profiles

All four participants had participated on a NCAA sanctioned athletic team at the Division One level and all have graduated college within the past three years. Amongst them I was able to solicit various residencies, grant-in-aid scholarship status, degrees, institution region, and sport. There was little racial diversity, with three out of the four participants identifying as white and one participant identifying as white and Asian American. Three out of the four participants indicated their pronouns as "She, her, hers", with the fourth participant (i.e., Alex) not indicating their pronouns. Because Alex did not indicate their pronouns they/their/them will be used as pronouns when referring to quotations and experiences related to Alex. All participants were student-athletes at institutions that are considered "Power Five" conferences: the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), Southeastern Conference (SEC), the Big 10 Conference, Big 12 Conference, and Pac-12 Conference. None of the participants in this study disclosed they were transgender. See Table 1 for a demographic summary of my participants.

Table 1

Name	Pronouns	Age	Race/ Ethnicity	Confer- -ence	Region	Residency	Grant- in-aid Status	Degree and Grad Date	Sport
Taylor*	She/her/ hers	24	White , Asian Ameri can	ACC	South	Out-of- state	None	B.A., May 2015	Winter, non- revenue generating
Jamie*	She/her/ hers	23	White	Big 10	Midwest	In-state	Yes, partial	B.A., May 2016	Winter, non- revenue generating
Morgan *	She/her/ hers	22	White	Big 10	Great Plains	Out-of- state	Yes, partial	B.S., May 2017	Fall, non- revenue generating
Alex*	<i>Left blank</i>	23	White	Big 10	Midwest	In-state	None	B.S.E., December 2017	Winter, non- revenue generating

**Pseudonyms used*

Taylor. Taylor was a Division One student-athlete at an ACC institution, where she competed in a winter, non-revenue generating sport. As an out-of-state student who received no grant-in-aid scholarship funding, Taylor says she chose her institution because she loved the coaches and appreciated that her team trained under the same roof, with the same program, and the same coaches, as the men's team. She loved the team aspect of her experience, although found that going to a school in a southern state sometimes made her uncomfortable with the amount of religious undertones that affected her day-to-day experience. Taylor made three USA Olympic Trials appearances for her sport, and shared with me that her team was the highest ranked nationally at her institution while she was a student-athlete. Taylor now is pursuing graduate-level education at an institution in her home state.

Jamie. Jamie was an in-state, partial grant-in-aid recipient at her institution. She trained and competed through injuries during her time as a Big Ten student-athlete, and graduated in May of 2016. Jamie got involved in athletics via her parents influence, with many of family members involved in high-level sport. Jamie's parents chose to get her involved in a variety of sports due to the character building experiences, the focus on physical health, the ability to develop healthy competitive outlets, and the opportunity to tune in to her physical strength. Jamie chose her institution not only through the recruiting process but also through the strong sense of community and pride her Big Ten institution has. She also had a strong focus on academics during her undergraduate career, and managed to find an in-state institution where she could manage her finances effectively with scholarship offers and in-state tuition, in conjunction with excellence in her chosen academic field.

Morgan. Similar to Jamie, Morgan also battled injuries while she was a student-athlete at her Big Ten institution from 2013 through 2016. Morgan was an out-of-state student but received a partial grant-in-aid scholarship, which she was able to combine with academic scholarships her last three years of her undergraduate career to not have to pay for anything for college. Morgan was recruited to her institution while she was injured in high school, and appreciated that her coaches were still willing to support her development as an athlete despite multiple surgeries during her high school and collegiate career. That developmental support helped Morgan choose her institution. Morgan describes herself as very career driven, and took advantage of several opportunities at her institution outside of the athletics department. She described the support she received from her institution when she was injured as unparalleled, as they spared no expenses in supporting her recovery.

Alex. Alex started competing in their sport in high school when they chose to try out for the team despite not truly enjoying it originally. Their father attended the same university they eventually went to and grew up in a community that took pride in that institution. Some of the things they loved about their student-athlete experience included the opportunities that came with being a student-athlete, whether that was academic or career opportunities, the opportunity to travel, networking events, the community and team that eventually became family, and the feeling of being a part of something bigger than yourself. Alex said no one can replace those teammates that see you in your highest of highs and lowest of lows and you cannot possibly replace those people in your life. Alex felt as though they were not as supported by their athletic department as some other athletes were. This conclusion was drawn largely due to not being able to find tutors for their specific academic field. Alex has still managed to gain employment in their industry and made a cross-country move after graduating in December of 2016.

Overview of the Student-Athlete Experience

Before exploring the findings of this study in greater detail, it's important to build context outside of just participant profiles. As noted in Chapter Two, being a student-athlete can be the most impactful experience for a student during their time in college. Each participant was asked specifically what they loved about their experience, what they didn't, what they felt they gained from their time as a student-athlete, and what they felt they missed out on. All participants were able to easily identify what made their time as a student-athlete rewarding and, in hindsight, what wasn't as satisfying.

What Participants Gained. All participants were quick to speak to the positives of their student-athlete experience. Most spoke of their team, which became their family or their home away from home. For Taylor, the team was part of the reason she chose her institution:

I think the biggest thing for sure was just the team aspect of it...you know, my institution wasn't the most academically rigorous school, and I kind of always knew I wanted to go to grad school. So I was a lot more focused on what I could get out of my sport during that time, and the people on my team were always really great, the coaches were awesome.

Sentiments about the personal relationships formed were also echoed by Alex, who enthusiastically talked about their former teammates:

I loved the people that became like family and the community. You know like I said, my institution is a really proud school and everyone is really proud to be a part of that. But more specifically, my teammates are like family. They're lifelong best friends, and you know you literally can't replace people like that that you spend every waking second with, all your ups all your downs, all your highest and highs and lowest of lows, you really do become a family.

Jamie spoke of her time as a student-athlete as "living out her childhood dream." During her undergraduate career, Jamie said she often found herself reminding herself about the 12 year old girl who dreamed of attending her institution. Jamie and Alex both spoke to what a unique opportunity it was have that student-athlete type status, and what a privilege it was to represent their institution, Alex said that they "liked being a part of something bigger than I was", and Morgan recognized how "cool" it was to be able to participate in athletics at such an elite level.

The participants described the tangible and transferable skills they gained from their undergraduate experiences. Even prior to becoming an NCAA Division One student-athlete, Jamie spoke positively about the impact athletics had had on her life overall: "Particularly you know those character building opportunities, having a better sense of health and wellness, having

a healthy competitive drive, and being in tune with your body and your strength.” Jamie was confident in sharing that it made them stronger as a person, and said

It made me more organized, gave me time management skills, and it gave me a sense of motivation and dedication. You learn crazy dedication and motivation... You learn how to motivate yourself and how to dedicate yourself to something like that. You learn how to be a hard worker. You have to be hardworking, you have to be completely focused on everything like school, work, homework, friends, how to be a good teammate.

Morgan shared almost exact sentiments:

There are all of those intangible things about being an athlete. You know it’s the mindset, the determination, the discipline. You have to have discipline, I mean the time management skills you have to have. There are so many intangible things that are helping me now. I would just say it’s more, it helped me prepare for what comes next.

All participants expressed how grateful they were for not only the experiences they had as student-athletes but also what they were able to take away from their time in athletics.

What Participants Missed Out On. When asked as to what they feel they may have missed out on by participating in intercollegiate athletics, participants took more of a pause and had to think the question through a fraction longer. Mostly what participants spoke of missing out on was their academic experience. Taylor stated that:

Academics was definitely the thing I felt like I missed out on the most. It just hard to be involved in academic student groups [registered student organizations]. I really wanted to study abroad at some point, but you know I was never going to be able to take a whole semester off without my coach getting too mad.

Taylor also felt like grade requirements were too lenient at times: “A 2.0 isn’t getting you anywhere.” Taylor excelled academically while still feeling like she could have pursued more academically. Jamie echoed similar statements in regards to feeling accomplished, while also wishing she could have experienced additional opportunities: “I missed out on stuff, but I made it work for me.” Several participants spoke of academic experiences they felt they missed out on. Participants sometimes went from their academic experiences (or lack there of) to social experiences. Alex reframed their answer to this question several times, settling on:

Um, you know in college if you had asked me that I probably would have said [in terms of missing out on things] all my friends were getting to do seemingly fun things, but you know I think I’ve always known that my opportunity was bigger than the “fun things” [air quotes]. Because the fun things I missed out on were probably like going to the bars on a Thursday or you know like going to a party. What I thought I missed out I probably didn’t at all, my opportunity was way bigger than that, and probably more fun anyways.

Overall, the general tone of my interviews was that participants felt they gained more from their athletic experiences than what they might have missed out on academically or socially. Morgan added at the end of her statement that “I mean, what I missed out on was really the social things, but what I gained from my sport probably outweighs what I could have been doing.”

Time Demands. The time commitment of being a student-athlete came up often as something that affected their day-to-day student experience significantly. Currently, the NCAA has regulations stating that student-athletes can only participate in their sport for 20 hours per week during the regular season, with varying regulations for the off-seasons depending on the sport. Alex spoke of the time commitment as a negative, who called their schedule a “four year ball of stress”, while others spoke to the time commitment as a positive growing experience.

Jamie verbalized that the 20 hour rule “provides structure...student-athletes are known for their great time management, and creating a structure within themselves, creating and following a schedule, and that leads well into what you do after college.” The time commitment and 20 hour rule mandated by the NCAA also came up as a policy that individuals found ways to manipulate, particularly in the off-season. Taylor said that “You know our coaches used to say even though we had over 20 hours, that ‘every practice was optional’ (air quotes), but it’s like never optional.” Alex stated that they felt like the 20 hour rule was constantly being debated or discussed at her institution, as in “what that should look like, and it if should look different for different sports or seasons.” They added that “I do think that it’s important to have those regulations on practice hours, and I know that most teams like a lot of teams work around that anyways by doing optional practice hours or things like that.”

Injuries. An additional factor that played in their student-athlete experience was injuries. Getting injured as Division I student-athlete almost felt like part of the culture, as it’s built into the programming, with every team having full-time athletic trainers and athletic training students to assist them. Athletic departments invest a significant amount of time and money into their athletic training and sports medicine departments to support student-athletes. Morgan suffered from significant injuries during her career, requiring multiple surgeries. She called the experience “isolating”, as she could no longer practice or compete with the team, but also acknowledged that “hey, it’s part of the sport, you know it’s always a risk.” Jamie felt like there wasn’t a lot of support at her institution when it came to supporting student-athletes who were injured, and elaborated to say that:

A lot of people accused me of lying about my injuries just to get out of practice. And that was not the case at all, you know I had been diagnosed with legitimate injuries by athletic

trainers, surgeons...I felt like there wasn't a great culture of support while I was injured, and those were the kind of things in which you need the most support, you know injury is so hard to overcome. Besides the lack of support, there's already so much pressure to perform, both in the classroom and in your sport as a student-athlete. I felt like over time I was really isolating myself with that injury from needing to do different things.

Jamie also spoke to that pressure when it came to taking care of her body and managing her injuries, saying that the pressure to perform contributed to her saying "I wasn't taking care of my body, and my body's needs, and I wasn't getting the proper recovery time." While the other two participants did not suffer injuries to the same extent, both could easily identify injuries as part of the overall student-athlete experience.

Introduction to Themes

Across all of my interviews with the four participants, three themes emerged. These themes connected what policies participants knew and the policies they weren't aware of, how culture played into their day-to-day lived experiences more than policy, their desire for transparency from their institution and the NCAA, their trust in their coaches but mixed reviews for their administrators, and other aspects of their lived experiences that came into play more often than their gender identities. The themes that emerged from my interviews helped to address my research questions in regards to how supported participants felt with their academic and athletic goals based on their gender identity. All participants were able to identify aspects of their student-athlete experience they loved and skills they gained from their time competing in NCAA Division One athletics, while also recognizing the challenges they faced (regardless of gender). The themes are organized into three main categories: looking at policy, exploring the experiences of being a female student-athlete, and highlighting the educational programming they did and did

not receive. These themes all resulted from their lived experiences, salient identities, and what they took with them from their student-athlete experience.

Theme I: Policy in Practice; Integrated, Normalized, and Unspoken

Participants' responses to questions regarding specific policies demonstrated a lack of knowledge or lack of familiarity with those policies. Taylor explicitly told me "I had never seen any of those before" in reference to NCAA publications. Certain policies had more of an instant recall reaction, like Title IX for example. Participants held varying opinions on Title IX. There were also variations in the accuracy of their statements made in regards to Title IX, and confusion or lack of familiarity on the details of Title IX including compliance. Some participants reported that their education on Title IX had been from informal conversations with friends or peers, and two participants even used the phrase "word of mouth" when asked to describe how they learned certain information about gender compliance within their athletics department. Participants felt a sense of gratefulness when it came to Title IX, with Morgan adding "Don't get me wrong, I'm thankful for it as it paid for my school" (referring to the scholarship she received as a student-athlete), which as an out-of-state student was a significant cost. Additionally, once participants were able to look over the policies and recommendations for practice many were able to see in hindsight how policies affected them. Morgan summarized her experience learning about policy as:

To be honest, I feel like my institution tried to dumb everything down and only tried to tell you things that only specifically related to today. So I can talk about the food stuff we got for free, and our practice times, but outside of a lot of that I hardly like, I hardly know a ton of what's going on behind the scenes and what they're being careful of. I can

confidently say that I knew like if I look back I can say like yeah okay my coaches never did that, or this is why we did that, but I never put two and two together that this was a regulation. That's just what was normal.

While opinion on policy varied, and education on policies and publications seemed to be lacking or non-existent, no participants could specifically identify policies that they felt were lacking or missing that would have been necessary.

Education or lack thereof. A number of participants disclosed the policies and publications I provided to them during the course of this research study were brand new information. Alex kept it brief- when asked if they had heard of certain policies or recommendations for practice they responded “No, definitely not.” They responded in the same way when it came to the Gender Equity Planning documents. Morgan echoed similar statements, stating she had never seen those policies “in that form”, but couldn't recall where specifically she would have seen them or in what forms. Taylor acknowledged that she had never seen the three prongs of Title IX compliance explained before, and took issue with the vagueness of the language:

So participation opportunities, enrollment, history and continued practice...I wonder how many schools are compliant with actual program expansion. And maybe that's something that's an issue with Title IX is that it's not, some of this is so broad. It's not very, there are so many different ways that you could apply this. Especially the history and continued practice part. It doesn't seem to have like a very high standard for an institution to pass that.

When asked a follow up question as to if she had ever received any education on the expansion of women's sports at her institution, she responded with a similar “word of mouth” sentiment I

had heard from other participants: “No, I mean they never really talked about it with us. We always just like, you hear rumors and stuff.”

It is also worth noting that Taylor and Alex were on their institution’s Student-Athlete Advisory Committees, which seek to bridge the gap between athletic administration and student-athletes. Alex added that they felt policy conversations came up more frequently for them than others because of their involvement on that committee, but very rarely overall in their day-to-day student-athlete experience. Additionally, when asked if they received any education on policy changes that were being implemented, Alex responded with “Honestly, I have no idea.”

Jamie had a unique exposure to certain NCAA policies, as she had researched them on her own time for a school project during her senior year of her undergraduate career. She admitted that she took issue with the lack of transparency or marketing in regards to the published NCAA policies, saying:

First of all, if it wasn’t for the research I did in one of my classes, I never would have seen these. I think actually getting them out in front of the student-athletes is important. I mean honestly, I do remember, every single year sitting down and signing like the books worth of forms that we had from compliance officers, it gets a little old after a while, so even if you put it in front of the student-athletes they might not pay attention... The fact that I don’t remember if this education existed also goes to show the fact that it wasn’t communicated well-enough.

All participants actually referenced the same beginning of the year meeting with compliance officers and the athletics compliance department, as that seems to be the main or only source of education when it comes to NCAA bylaws and regulations. Taylor referred to it as “I don’t remember like when we would fill out those packets at the beginning of the year, I don’t know if

we ever walked away with anything there.” Morgan recalled compliance coming in to discuss policies with her team “once or twice a year, but it wasn’t very in depth”, adding “I mean every year you have the stupid, well not stupid, compliance thing. They’ll come in and tell you what you can and can’t do so there’s always that.”

Trust in coaches. Several participants spoke to the trust they had in their coaches to understand and interpret policy for them. Taylor described her team culture surrounding discussions on policies looked:

We would hear some stuff about it throughout the year, people getting drug tested and things like that, but I don’t think as an athlete we didn’t hear about it [policy] too much. I think it was more of like, we just assumed the coaches knew and were ensuring that everything was okay, and that compliance was there.

Alex also mentioned several times a close relationship and respect they had for their coach, adding “I felt like I was really close with my coach and could tell my coach anything.” Taylor also mentioned that if she had experienced any form of gender discrimination or sexual harassment, she would have turned to a female coach first. Morgan also stressed the trust she had in her coaches, stating that “Our coaches were very approachable guys. I might not have agreed with every decision they made, but they both absolutely will be receiving invitations to my wedding kind of thing.”

Overall, the participants felt as though the information provided to them on policies was lacking or nonexistent. The primary source of information for them was either the beginning of the year compliance meeting from their own athletic department or from the coaches themselves.

Lack of Institutional Transparency. Participants noted the lack of transparency when it came to the documents and policies published by their institution or the NCAA. Many responses

to seeing the documents for the first time were “I’ve never seen this before” or “I didn’t know this existed” and were closely followed by a statement or question asking where those publications have been. When asked about what recommendations she might make to coaches or athletic administrators in regards to policy, Taylor said that:

I think transparency is probably the first one... I think the big thing is transparency, and then communication about like policies. I’d be interested to know ... if the NCAA is [has] required institutions to have like, something along the lines of that sample plan. And like if that’s the case, sub question, is that public? And if it is public, it’s obviously not that public because nobody can find it.

Additionally, Taylor spoke to the need for accountability following that transparency “for whatever policies are in place.” She also added that “It seems like a lot of them are about like planning. It didn’t seem like there was a ton of what happens if you don’t follow the guidelines.” Jamie added that:

I do think that I got fair treatment from those kind of quantitative aspects, so like participation, and opportunity, and things like that, but I can’t recall any really like accommodations like my school having any type of gender equity plan for athletics. I mean perhaps they didn’t feel they need to mention the policy directly they were just trying to implement it, but also like I feel like they needed to do a better job of prioritizing that issue. At least I felt like I was questioning it [gender equality] the whole time.

Often times participant responses to questions were really just more questions, asking about where the policies were published, wondering if their own institutions had gender equity plans, or why they hadn’t seen these publications sooner. Taylor also noted in regards to transparency

and institutions putting out their policies publically “Obviously like, I can see an institution being afraid of publishing something like that. You’re like putting those goals out there, and you might not make them, but at least you’re recognizing deficiencies.”

The lack of institutional transparency in regards to the action steps they were or were not taking in regards to gender equity planning for compliance resulted in a point of question for student-athletes. The participants expressed a clear desire to know more about Title IX compliance from their institution, and what their athletic departments were doing to support women.

Theme II: Being a Woman at a Division One, Power Five Institution

The experiences of being a woman participating on an intercollegiate athletics team, particularly at Division One institutions within Power Five conferences, seems to have been dictated more by culture than policy for the participants in this study. While discussions surrounding policies and recommendations for practice took up a large portion of our interviews, each participant had their own stories, attitudes felt, or experiences outside of policy that made them feel as though they were still not the priority of their athletics departments compared to cisgender men. On paper, policy purports that women have equal opportunity for participation (via Title IX) and have equal footing within that participation for programmatic aspects like equipment, travel, practice times, or academic assistance. The lived experiences of participants however showed a different side to intercollegiate athletics by identifying attitudes, behaviors, and campus climates are not as equitable as policy may have the public believe. As summarized by Jamie, “Men are so much more put up on a pedestal than the women.” She was able to highlight some very specific examples from her institution where she felt women weren’t as valued as the men in the athletic department:

I think the idea of prioritizing men over women is kind of university wide. Something that I talked about in one of my gender studies classes in college, it was kind of focused on gender in sport, is that there are a number of social media accounts that call the men's team for example "@InstitutionBasketball" and that's what the men's team is. But then for the women, they call it "@InstitutionWomensBasketball." So it's basketball, and women's basketball. And like a lot of people don't notice it, but that is then reinforcing that men's team are normalized, and that is neutral, and that's the default. And women are extra... It's something small, but at the same time like a lot of people internalize that and take that for granted, and kind of subconsciously absorb that, and that kind of ends up being you know normalized, and the default, like I said.

Jamie brings the focus to the unique findings of these interviews, that had very little to do with policy. How we treat women and female athletes is really just a reflection of how we treat women in society in general, as outside the norm.

The following sub-themes demonstrate how participants felt as a woman on campus. These sub-themes highlight how culture influenced their lived experiences more than policy did, the lack of gender diversity within their athletic administration, and how they felt being members of teams who did not earn revenue for the institution.

Culture versus Policy. The concept of campus culture, athletic department culture, and team culture came up frequently in our conversations, despite my not asking a direct interview question addressing culture. Jamie explicitly acknowledged the pattern of culture not directly following policy, reminding us "We know from legislation that has been passed at both the federal and state level throughout history that it's much harder to change culture than it is to change policy." Later on in the same conversation, she reiterated that "Policy is much easier to

write than it is to implement, and culture can take a while to adjust, and change.” Jamie stressed culture a third time, adding:

You know for the most part Title IX focuses on the quantitative aspects, like measurable comparisons between the treatment of women, whether it’s sexual harassment or you know participation numbers or scholarship numbers or things like that. But I think there definitely needs to be an expansion of the ways that people are treated, and that also lends to what I mentioned earlier with like legislative change or something that’s like quantitative, or something that can be measured can be easier to implement than something that can’t be measured, like day to day treatment and interactions and culture, and things of that nature. So I guess I don’t have an answer how you implement that?

That is a big huge thing that requires a lot of thought and unpacking.

Jamie went as far as to say that at times, she felt like her existence was not as important as the men participating in the same domain and the same sport, saying there were times where she felt “I was just like, wow, I feel like the women are here just to fulfill quota for Title IX.” Her opinions on culture were shared by other participants. Morgan specifically recalls comments being made towards her from other student-athletes at her institution, sharing the story:

The closest I ever got to feeling put down because I was a girl, I was sitting by where they make our shakes and stuff, and one of the football players with his friends looked at me and asked “Why aren’t you making our shakes?” and I was like “I’m on the [athletic] team, I’m not going to make your shakes.” I mean a lot of what we get is men not respecting us. I was literally sitting there, watching TV. There’s no reason why he should have looked at me like “oh why aren’t you making our shakes?” Like you can make your own damn shake.

Jamie felt like treatment of certain women's athletic teams at her institution set up a culture where "Women's sports are you know irrelevant and they're not important and they're not real athletes." She also felt like the athletic department as a whole placed more importance on the men's teams' standings than the women's, despite training on a combined team with the same practice schedules and coaching staffs. She stated that:

Well, even on my team I think that there was definitely more passion put into the men's team. You know like if the women's team performed poorly year after year after year, it wasn't necessarily...like I don't think the coaches' success was measured on us. I think that it depended really just on how the men's team did, like if the men's team was doing pretty well the coaches were praised, and all was good, and it didn't really matter how the women's team did. Athletic-wide too, I mean I kind of feel the same way, like the success of the athletic department was measured on football and basketball, men's basketball, not women's.

She added that the attitudes within her athletic department and within the campus community were reflected in today's society overall, saying "I mean nationwide people care more about men's sports for whatever reason." Jamie, who also participated on a combined team with the same practice schedules and coaching staff for men and women, felt like her coaches prioritized the men's team both physically and emotionally.

I felt like the men's team was prioritized over the women's team, in that when we did have joint practices, where it was men and women training together, the intervals that were established were based on the needs of the males.... over time that is what injured me... We say like gender this and gender that, and I'm like well bodies are different sizes, and generally women are smaller than men, by and large that's biologically true

and scientifically true, and yes I'm like an outspoken feminist who is like I can do whatever a guy can do! But I know my body's limits.

Jamie also spoke to her coaches having several more meetings with the men's team than the women's, adding that the women's team ended up doing significantly more physical work without any additional recovery time. Jamie said when someone addressed the coaches about this concern, and the fact that men's team "through having those team meetings, were creating more bonds like emotional bonds and bonds with the coaches too, connecting with each other and things like that", the coaches said they would address the issue and "they didn't."

Campus culture, in regards to how female athletic teams were treated versus how male athletic teams were treated was a factor in the lived experiences and day-to-day lives of participants. Closely related to that concern was the impact of how different sports generated or did not generate revenue for the institution.

Revenue versus Non-Revenue Generating Programs. The concept of revenue versus non-revenue generating athletic programs came up several times in my discussions with participants. As mentioned previously in Chapter Two, revenue generating sports traditionally are football and men's basketball, with some additions or variations depending on the school. For the most part, women's athletic teams are not revenue generating programs. Participants were well aware of this fact, and it came up in ways including off hand comments or direct justifications for differences in student-athlete support. Taylor acknowledged the discrepancy while addressing an unrelated question "Like you're not bring in revenue for the school so they don't really care too much" Morgan brought up the topic when discussing Title IX:

So, as I think about Title IX and lately, and I'm sitting here like okay, "women are participating in everything why does it even matter? Like why do we even need Title

IX?" I always get very narrow minded on the sports aspect. I'm sitting here like women participate in sports though, it's not like how it was when my mom was growing up. And as I'm reading more about it I'm sitting here like the second you ease up on there goes all the women's sports because most of them are not revenue generating sports. So there's more of an emphasis on football, basketball, and the sports that actually produce income... I don't know how they would make it better because the athletic department is also like out to make money, they're not just here to let me play around for four years.

Morgan added to her statement by saying "We know we're inferior to football because we don't make money" and "I almost don't think it's like a gender thing, but like who makes us money that day." Alex expressed similar attitudes towards revenue generating athletic teams, with almost a shrug that suggested it wasn't important.

I mean being a non-rev athlete, like non-revenue, we're not a big popular sport like football or men's basketball. You're kind of naturally overlooked but I don't know, I think that's understandable. If I'm not bringing in any revenue I might not be as important as the athletes who are earning like millions of dollars a year for the athletic department.

The focus on revenue versus non-revenue generating athletic programs, and the participants almost nonchalance in regards to attitudes surrounding that, almost suggests an internalization of needing to prove your worth in order to receive proper treatment as a student-athlete. As the participants spoke of the sports that earned revenue for the institution, they only mentioned male dominated teams (football and men's basketball). None of the participants provided examples of where their institution had women's athletic teams that generated revenue for the athletics department.

While culture and revenue status impacted the day-to-day experiences of their participants I spoke to, several participants also spoke how the administration within their athletic department held revenue generating sports on a pedestal in comparison to non-revenue generating sports. They found that leadership displayed within their athletic department trickled down to how the athletic department culture may have been formed in general.

Athletic Administration. Athletic administration and administrators came up in two ways during my conversations with participants. First, participants spoke to the representation of those within their athletic administration, and the lack of diversity (for gender and other diverse identities) within those who are actually implementing the policies. Second, participants spoke to the feeling that they weren't as valued in the eyes of their administrators due to the lack of revenue generated from their specific teams.

Jamie highlighted the need for those who are writing policies to understand the experiences of those they are writing policies for:

I think the representation of athletic leadership and administrative leadership is vital to the policies that they write, in that there should be people who are transgender who are sitting on board and executive leadership teams, within athletics. And within all leadership! Whether it's within the academic side of a university or the athletic side of the university. So I think folks who are making decisions on how women are treated in athletics, those people should be women. Because they know that experience. As part of that, those who are not women should be educated in the process so they can better speak to it and they can be better allies in the future.

Jamie compared the process to current national debates surrounding women's reproductive health care:

Why should a politician who's never had to experience a pregnancy, why should they be writing policy on pregnancy and how a woman chooses how she wants to live her life? It doesn't make sense, they will never experience that so then why do they get to make a decision about that? I think that should be the same with athletics, you know there are things that women experience in athletics that men will never experience in athletics, so then why should a man be making that decision for a woman?

Due to this lack of representation and lack of response when Jamie went to the athletic department with concerns, Jamie says that she was unsure if she could trust the administration at her institution. She spoke of a time where she knew that a coach was in violation of NCAA policy. I've withheld a description of the violation at the participant's request. Jamie stated that

You know I went to the athletic department and they totally skirted it, they didn't even properly report it. So that was like the point in time where I felt like wow I don't feel like I can trust the administrators because I feel like they're not taking my complaints seriously.

Jamie's non-verbal cues at this point in the conversation included hand gestures emphasizing frustrations and questioning the decisions of her athletic department. While she spoke of her athletic experience overall in a fond manner, she spoke of her direct experiences with athletic administrators as frustrating and unsupportive.

Alex expressed similar concerns with their institution's athletic administration, and stated that they felt like one of the upper level administrators within their department "He didn't care about women's sports at all, but I don't know if he even like cared about any athletes except for football." They felt as though there was a double standard for those in their department, reflective of the culture. Alex felt like the impact from administration, outside of just coaches

and student-athletes, affected the athletic department as a whole: “Administrative support definitely wasn't there, and I think in cultures like that. Like culture definitely trickles down from the top, I strongly believe that culture is a direct reflection of administration and leadership.” With this, Alex was able to tie in how they felt they athletic administration wasn't as supportive of women's athletic team programs and how that translated into campus culture.

Theme III: Education and Life Skills Programming

As previously noted, the most common response to “Did you receive any education or information on these policies?” was a resounding “No” or “I don't think so.” Overall, participants had significant challenges when it came to recollecting the education they may have received on NCAA bylaws and regulations outside of the annual compliance meeting, that many admitted to not remembering much about. Often times, in response to my questions about educational programming they may or may not have received, participants were able to speak to certain programs their athletic departments sponsored that only rarely had to do with gender equity and/or diversity and inclusion programming. The theme speaks to the research question in regards to how the NCAA and their athletic department supported their academic and athletic goals during their undergraduate career. This theme highlights several aspects of programming that they felt supported their student-athlete experience, and several aspects of programming that may have been lacking.

Existing Programming. During my interviews, participants often took a long pause when asked about the education they received from their athletic department specifically. Certain topics were brought up by participants that really stood out to them which were outside of receiving (or not receiving) education on gender equity bylaws and policies.

Body Image. Body image first came up in my conversation with Taylor, when she referred to many concerns she felt female student-athletes were going through were “swept under the rug.” For Morgan, body image concerns were more prevalent within her student-athlete experiences. Morgan mentioned several times that the athletic department was attempting to address those concerns, not for her personally but for the department as a whole. Morgan said that:

Where we struggled was, really the women on, especially on my team and I'm sure on other women's teams, where we struggled more than the men's teams was on body image. So, at the end of my career, they started to do all these body image things that at least our team or all females were required to go. Honestly, that's really the only time. I know they do diversity stuff, but that's more based on race and not necessarily gender. Like some of our freshman would work out doing practice and then go to the gym after and work out and then sit in the sauna for two hours. And we got to the point where we had to start having discussions about it, and our nutritionist had to try and turn us towards healthier eating, and recovery, and he was stressing the point of you can't just, we have to treat our bodies and build our bodies in a way that shows we are athletes, not models. You can worry about thinner later, but not right now.

Morgan said she couldn't remember if the programming put on by the athletic department was open to male student-athletes, but she did know that certain female student-athletes were required to go by their coaches. This is a reflection on society's general preoccupation with the female body and reflection of general body image concerns on college campuses even outside of athletics. Alex shared similar concerns with body image issues being pervasive within their athletic department, speaking of a “girls time group” where they discussed primarily body image

issues and other concerns plaguing female student-athletes. Alex also shared that this group wasn't put on by their athletic department but by another student-athlete at the time.

Mental Health. Mental health was also a concern for Taylor that she felt was being “swept under the rug.” Morgan also brought up mental health programming while discussing body image, stating that she felt her institution “was trying to focus more on that [in reference to both body image and mental health concerns].” Jamie shared insights as to how being a student-athlete affected her mental health and wellness:

When you essentially retire and are no longer you know “Lauren the diver” or “Jamie the athlete”, then I remember thinking to myself several times then like “what am I?” Like kind of identifying yourself with that sport is a huge mental and emotional weight that a lot of athletes have. So, I mean when I was working in the athletic department when I was so injured I couldn't compete anymore, we were doing programming to help student-athletes cope with that, or coping with injury, kind of exiting the sport whether it's due to injury or you know due to just your eligibility runs out when you graduate.

Morgan also discussed the importance of the sport psychiatrist her athletic department had on staff. She felt like her sport psychiatrist was someone she could turn to in times of crisis or if she felt she had experienced any gender discrimination, and also spoke candidly that she knew many teammates who visited the sport psychiatrist “pretty frequently.”

Community. Certain participants spoke of the inherent pride they had in their institution, and the pride that the surrounding community had not only in their institution but in their athletic programs. As mentioned previously, Alex spoke several times of the benefits of feeling like you belonged to something “bigger than yourself.” They also said that “People in the community

look up to student-athletes, and kids, and it's a really big opportunity and it feels important to be a part of something like that.”

Conversely, Jamie spoke of the community development programming that came from her athletic department as almost a negative thing. She felt like being at a Southern school, there was a certain religious undertone that she noticed on her team and her athletic department. When she elaborated, she stated that:

I think having a lot of students that come from more southern states, and a lot of the coaches were fairly religious and they are probably going to do some recruiting for people with similar ideals and values as them. So you always had like, like people would come in and give a speech, and it was always like “with prayer” and all this kind of stuff before some events, and you didn’t really have the option to not. I mean you didn’t have to sit in on them, but it was also a team meeting so you kind of had to be there. So that was probably the thing that bothered me the most was that. Was just feeling that like, you know, you were maybe forced into something that you didn’t necessarily agree with.

She said she also noticed how this strong sense of community came into play when it came to recruiting practices, saying that

We would recruit people and I would kind of realize that they would have certain athletes meet with like certain people, and they were people who the coaches knew religion was a huge part of their life. So they also used it as like a recruiting tool.

Jamie said that while the religious undertones at her institution fostered a great sense of community, it grew so much during her time there that she “was starting to feel so uncomfortable with it towards the end of my senior year.”

Diversity. The majority of participants felt that their athletic department did provide programming on diversity and inclusion, particularly surrounding racial and ethnic diversity. Morgan said that she knew her athletic department put on diversity programming, and said that she believed programming had grown even more after she had graduated. She said that twice a year they would bring in a speaker to discuss “overall diversity and struggles, and how to power through.” She described those speaking events as:

Other times we've done, I know just recently they did a diversity thing that kind of talked about just race and really focused on African American history and what not. I think they're trying to push it more and more, and as I got older they started doing more things. I think a lot of times they would bring in a few speakers who would talk about some of the struggles they faced, whether that was being an African American or an amputee and how they fought against it.

Morgan said that she's seen an increase in the events specifically focusing on inclusion the athletic department has put on mostly through Twitter and Instagram, allowing her to stay connected with the athletic department.

Alex shared with me that through their involvement with the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee at her institution, they were made aware of diversity focus group meetings that occurred within the athletic department. They also made sure to note that these focus group meetings were diversity focused and not just minority focused, so “everyone was encouraged to come”, but also that “Yeah I don't know if I would have known about those events or paid attention to those events if I hadn't been on the advisory committee.”

Women's Leadership. Certain women's leadership programs and select body image seminars were the only mention of educational or life skills programming surrounding gender or

gender identities. Taylor was a member of this initiative at her institution, and said they got together about once a month. She described how each team sent three representatives and “we got together to talk about ways to like support your women’s team and how to help support other women’s teams. Like what can we do to be better.” Taylor reiterated that those conversations didn’t really involve any education on NCAA or institutional policies, and focused more on how to better serve their teams as leaders.

We just did activities where we would like try and be supportive of women, and some stuff that was just like reflecting too. Like I remember one time, the three of us that went, like the three captains, one of the activities was like sit with your captains, list all the members of your team, and list like the good attributes for the women on your team and also if you could give them like one constructive criticism to better support the team, so that was also interesting to be like reflective.

Jamie also mentioned her experience with a women’s leadership institute that was present at her institution but not affiliated with the athletic department. She also served on an institutional committee surrounding sexual assault and sexual harassment. Alex also recalled a program that was introduced while they were a student-athlete by a fellow student-athlete, but couldn’t remember if they ran events or programming outside of a conversational group.

I know that there was a gymnast who started a thing, I think it was specifically for women, I could be completely wrong. She started like a, it was kind of a thing that was for women athletes specifically. It was like, I don't want to call it a women's support group because that sounds like it's a negatively stigmatized thing. They would talk about women's issues.

None of the participants were able to identify if the gender programming or women's leadership programming offered by their athletic departments was reflective of what was offered on campus in general.

Non-Existent Programming. As discussed in Theme I, there was a certain lack of education in regards to policies surrounding gender, gender equity planning, and Title IX initiatives. Throughout the interviews, there seemed to be a certain air of "I wish I had known this," while also recognizing that in hindsight, none of the participants felt they were overtly discriminated against in regards to policies affecting their lived experiences. However, almost every participant was quick to notice that the policies and published recommendations for practice had little to no information for how to handle sexual misconduct, including sexual assault and harassment. While not solely a women's issue, it is a cause for concern that disproportionately affects women on college campuses, including female student-athletes.

Sexual Assault and Harassment. Taylor noted her observation right away when asked to review the policies, stating "I was surprised, like maybe I missed this, there wasn't a lot about sexual harassment." When asked if she had heard about how to potentially handle any sexual assault or harassment, she said:

Uh, I don't think. Not that I can remember, which like I feel like I would have remember. Obviously if they did talk about it, it didn't really stick much. I don't know, I don't remember ever really having anybody talk about that to us... That to me is like, probably something that I would imagine unfortunately happens. Like there's not a person to go to and not a system in place to deal with that.

Jamie surmised that the lack of information on sexual assault or sexual harassment policies may have reflected how the NCAA prioritized that information. She noted the short

length that it was mentioned in the published documents, asking “There’s only like one paragraph about sexual assault or sexual harassment. Is it just sexual harassment? It’s just sexual harassment.” She goes on to further elaborate by stating:

Like, given the day and age that we live in, every day there’s a new person whether they’re in politics, or athletics, or the media, that haven’t like come out but have like admitted to being like an abuser. There’s always like new accusations for those in power, and those without power too! I just think that, my guess is this document might be couple years old, I don’t see a date on it, and knowing the history my institution has had, you know Duke University, Penn State, a lot of institutions that are notorious for assault and harassment, I think overall given the climate that we live in now, the sexual harassment section needs to be a lot lengthier. Because that also feeds into day to day treatment too!

Alex, when asked about how where they would have gone if sexual harassment came up during her student-athlete experience, stated that it would have depended so much on the context of the situation but they didn’t know the direct pathway to report. Morgan admitted almost immediately that she couldn’t think of one specific person she would go to in order to disclose sexual harassment or explicit gender discrimination. My questions also led her to evaluate her own experience, theorizing that many of her team felt close to their athletic trainer.

But I don’t know what, like if you were to tell your athletic trainer, what duty does she have to tell somebody else? If it’s an issue do they not have any duty? If you talk to the wrong person or like if you don’t even know who the correct person is to bring a grievance to.

The participants expressed concerns that their institutions and their athletic departments may not have been doing enough to educate student-athletes on sexual assault and/or sexual

harassment. Most participants expressed confusion about how they would have handled such instances, as no one was able to speak to a specific process for handling such cases. Additionally, no one was able to recall receiving education about how to address such incidents.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research study was to investigate how NCAA policies on gender equity affected the lived experiences of student-athletes who did not identify as male. The themes that emerged helped to explore how policy became so internalized with the athletic culture it almost went unnoticed, how student-athletes at Division I institutions still felt a climate that marginalized women, and evaluated the educational and life skills programming student-athletes may or may not have received. The next chapter will look at what the practical implications of these findings may be. The chapter will also highlight potential limitations of this study, how the findings are connected to the literature, and if the findings are comparable to my own lived experiences and my positionality as a researcher. Additionally, the next chapter will discuss the implications for practice for those who work at the NCAA, within athletic departments, or within student affairs in general.

Chapter Five

Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how NCAA policy played a role in the day-to-day lived experiences of student-athletes who do not identify as male. In Chapter Two I discussed policy and literature surrounding the inclusion and diversity efforts of the NCAA in regards to gender inclusion including the historical formation of the NCAA as an organization and Title IX publications and other recommendations for practice. In Chapter Three I discussed my methodology and how I structured this study in regards to my own identities, the identities of my participants, the paradigm used, and my data analysis process. Chapter Four explored the themes that developed as a result of the eight interviews with participants. In this chapter, I discuss what those findings mean for my research questions, implications for practice as a student affairs and higher education professional, and suggestions for future research based on those findings. Additionally, I will also identify limitations of this study and how the findings resonate with my own lived experiences and identities as not only the primary researcher but a former Division I student-athlete.

Summary of Themes

The findings discussed in Chapter Four fell under three main themes: (1) Policy in Practice; Integrated, Normalized, Unspoken, (2) Being a Woman at a Division I, Power Five Institution, and (3) Educational and Life Skills Programming. Each theme was further explained by sub-themes with supporting data. As discussed in Chapter Three, the data analysis process went from an open coding model to an axial coding model, utilizing multiple variations of mind-maps and color-coding processes.

For Theme I: Policy in Practice; Integrated, Normalized, Unspoken explored how participants felt they did not hear much about policies or published recommendations for practice (or received any specific education on them) that affected their lived experiences. Participants, in hindsight, had always just assumed their coaches were educated on the policies and utilizing policies effectively. Coaches were often seen as the main source of information for policy interpretation and implementation. Additionally, several participants voiced how they wished they had either received information on the policy documents or wished their institution had been more transparent about what they were doing to ensure gender equity and equal opportunities for all genders and gender identities.

The second theme that emerged, Being a Woman at a Division I, Power Five Institution highlighted how being a woman, a marginalized gender identity within athletics, came with similar experiences as women in everyday society. Comments were made, attitudes were felt, and behaviors within the athletic department were exhibited with the intention to further marginalize women. The participants felt like oftentimes what they experienced had little or nothing to do with policy and nearly everything to do with the culture of the athletic department, campus climate, and general community attitudes towards women. Additionally, participants felt there was discrepancy in attitudes toward sports that tend to be revenue generating, typically football and men's basketball with some variation depending on the institution. In some cases it seemed participants had internalized the notion that revenue-generating sports deserved better treatment and differences in treatment came from a financial perspective and not a gendered perspective. Additionally, participants felt as though their athletic administration played a large role in the attitudes towards women at their institution, saying that they felt attitudes "trickled down" from upper level administrators. They were also able to recognize the discrepancies in

those who were making policy and those who were experiencing policy, and expressed a desire to have a wider variety of representation within upper levels of athletics administration at both their institution and the NCAA as a whole.

The third theme focused on programming these student-athletes did and did not receive from their conference, their institution, or their athletic department. While there may have been a lack of educational programming surrounding specific policies, participants were able to identify programming that was offered in regards to body image issues, mental health, community development programming, and certain women's leadership initiatives. This programming was not always offered within a gender framework and was open to the student-athlete population as a whole (with the exception of women's leadership initiatives). An aspect of programming, however that seemed to be lacking was information on sexual misconduct, including sexual assault and sexual harassment. Nearly all of the participants were able to recognize that within the policies and publications from the NCAA, there was little to no mention of sexual misconduct. This was reflected in the lack of educational programming on those topics put on by athletic departments. As discussed in Chapter Four, participants made meaning of this by expressing a desire for more information on Title IX policies in regards to sexual harassment and sexual assault.

Summary of Findings

Three research questions were developed to address the purpose of this study which was to utilize a policy framework to analyze how NCAA policy affected the lived experiences of student-athletes with marginalized gender identities. In developing these research questions, I knew that policy has consequences on cultures, attitudes, and public opinion. In this section, I will be briefly discuss the findings not by themes that emerged from the interviews, but by each

research question specifically to further discuss whether this study accomplished its original purpose.

1. According to the lived experience of participants, how effective are NCAA policies and recommendations for practice at supporting female student-athletes in regards to their academic and athletic goals?

After speaking with the participants at length about their lived experiences and analyzing the themes that developed from those interviews, it seems as though the NCAA policies and recommendations for practice are adequate and effective at supporting the academic and athletic goals of student-athletes. At first glance over the data, all participants were able to articulate how they felt supported by their institution in one way or another and never felt outright discrimination in regards to their gender or gender identities. Upon analysis however, when participants spoke of campus culture and athletic department climate, they did not feel supported. Participants were able to speak to how they felt they received equal benefits in the quantifiable aspects of their experiences- equipment, academic support, practice schedules, or unlimited food, with the only exception being one participant who spoke of team meeting length. Despite the lack of education on said policies, several participants were also able to recognize in hindsight how the policies were effective at supporting their gender identities. Additionally, while participants spoke to wishing they had received the information earlier and frustration at the lack of transparency from the institution, none of the participants expressed that they felt like they were searching for policy information while they were undergraduates.

2. To what extent do NCAA policies and recommendations for practice help to facilitate an inclusive environment for female student-athletes?

While NCAA policies and recommendations for practice may have supported the quantifiable aspects of their student-athlete experience, the NCAA and their individual institutions may not have fostered the most inclusive environment. Each participant was able to speak to a specific experience where they felt like they were being marginalized as a cisgender woman, and as a female student-athlete. These experiences were as explicit as other student-athletes (typically males on a revenue-generating team) making derogatory comments towards participants or implicit like feeling as though dismissive and marginalizing attitudes towards female student-athletes stemmed from the male leadership within their athletic administration. For example, two participants were able to highlight that the senior athletic administrators at their institution only seemed to outwardly care about the football or men's basketball teams. These general findings in regards to this research question also illustrated that these negative interactions may not have stemmed from a policy framework but from a campus climate and athletic department culture that did not value female student-athletes as much as their male counterparts.

3. How can educators adapt policy to better fit the lived student-athlete experience for women?

Of the three research questions developed, this question has the least of a direct answer to it. Most participants, when asked about what recommendations they would make to athletic administrators in regards to editing policy, felt stuck. None of the participants were able to provide direct edits or additions for what would improve the policies provided to them. Some spoke of their discomfort with making recommendations, as they didn't feel like they were experts, or well informed enough to suggest edits. Participants at times during the interviews expressed questions along the lines of time commitment concerns, scholarship limits and

variability, and how administrators treated coaches and female student-athletes, but no one expressed explicit directives for what could be improved upon. The closest any participants came to providing more direct suggestions for how to improve policies and recommendations for practice were the suggestions that they would have wanted more information on handling sexual misconduct, including sexual assault and harassment, from both an individual and institutional perspective. Participants felt they would have appreciated additional information on how institutions would have handled those situations and also education on what processes or systems of support were available to student-athletes who may have experienced sexual misconduct.

Reflexivity

The findings and themes developed from the interviews with participants align with my own lived experiences, to an extent. As mentioned in my positionality statement in Chapter Three, I identify as a cisgender woman who experiences the world through that gendered lens. My previous experiences have included five years as a Division I student-athlete at a Big Ten institution, where I was fortunate enough to receive an athletic scholarship that covered the majority of my expenses. I also was, and still am, an international student from Canada on an F-1 student visa. The experiences of the participants that resonated with my own include how I was treated as a female student-athlete at an institution where the focus and excitement surrounded revenue-generating men's sports. I feel as though at the time, when I was a student-athlete from 2010 through 2015, I did not notice as much the attitudes and behaviors that were directed towards me as a woman. Like many college students, I had internalized certain ideals about men's sports being normalized and that comments in regards to my gender identity were to be expected as it was something I had experienced my whole life. In hindsight, I recognize now the

problematic ways I was treated because of my gender during my time as a student-athlete, in implicit and explicit ways.

Where I feel my experiences differed from the participants was with their opinions and knowledge base in regards policy. This is primarily where my identity as an international student came into play, as well as my academic experiences. During my undergraduate career, I earned a Bachelor's of Arts in Ethics and Public Policy and a Bachelor's of Science in Recreation and Sport Management. The combination of sports management and public policy led me to complete my own research on NCAA policies and regulations, out of my own curiosity, and for a variety of coursework assignments. Additionally, I did not grow up in a country where Title IX came into play during my K-12 schooling. When I began the recruiting process in 2008 through when I eventually signed my letter of intent in 2009 and beyond, I did my own research on Title IX regulations and what that meant for my search for an athletic scholarship. When I began this research study, I already felt significantly informed on Title IX policies and regulations.

Connections to Literature

As discussed in Chapter Two, the historical development of the NCAA as an organization was primarily to cater to male student-athletes. It wasn't until the NCAA found a way to make a profit from women's athletic programming, by bundling media revenue packages with men's athletic programs, that it was able to lure institutions away from the Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women by packaging media revenues together (Bass, Schaeperkoetter, & Bunds, 2015). This NCAA mentality of historically only recognizing women's athletic programs as a means of earning revenue is reflected in the participants lived experiences, as feeling as though they weren't as valued as their male peers. Some participants even felt as though other student-athletes at their institution were recruited to be student-athletes

strictly because of their gender identities in order to satisfy Title IX requirements. In regards to Title IX, the literature explored how vague the interpretations of compliance could be by discussing the 1979 policy interpretations and enforcements (Bass, Schaeperkoetter, & Bunds, 2015). Participants however were quick to mention that the policies from the NCAA had extensive information on planning procedures but not as much information on accountability procedures. One participant also expressed desire for the NCAA to provide some type of publication or database where individuals could research whether or not an institution was in compliance with Title IX. Additionally, as discussed in the literature, the three prongs of Title IX compliance included:

1. Providing opportunities for participation in intercollegiate sports by gender in approximate proportion to undergraduate enrollment (substantial proportionality);
2. Demonstrating a history and continued practice of expanding opportunities for the underrepresented gender (continued expansion); or,
3. Presenting proof that it is effectively accommodating the athletic interest of the underrepresented gender (full accommodation) (Bass, Schaeperkoetter, & Bunds, 2015).

As the participants received direct benefits from this legislation, few were able to articulate what the three prongs of compliance meant, and expressed confusion as to how their institution would compare. This aligns with the literature by highlighting that the Office of Civil Rights never released additional policy interpretations, or definitions for terms like substantial proportionality (Stafford, 2004). The participants lived experiences and their confusion surrounding compliance aligns with the confusion in the literature around the same compliance concerns.

Title IX and men's sports were also a point of conversation for participants. Participants often times spoke to examples of men's sports getting cut, or unqualified female student-athletes being recruited, in order to be compliant with Title IX. Participants experiences with certain student-athletes only being recruited because of their gender due to Title IX requirements is in alignment with the public perception of Title IX and the perceived decrease of men's athletic teams across the country (Sabo, 1998). Participants' perceptions were also consistent with the general public misperceptions in regards to the decrease in men's athletic programs. The literature however shows a contrasting view of this public perception, highlighting that over a twenty-year period after the enactment of Title IX, men's athletic team still had a net overall increase in the number of men's athletic team programs (Sabo, 1998). The literature further disproves the claim that Title IX is responsible for the dropping of men's sports programs by exploring the astronomical expenses of various football programs, including their scholarship allocations as governed by the NCAA. The research explores how institutions are not necessarily making room in their athletic department rosters for more female student-athletes, but for football recruiting, equipment, and scholarship costs that by only reducing by a slight amount would provide funding for two full male athletic teams (Simon, 2005).

As highlighted in both the review of current literature and interviews with participants, the generation of revenue remains a large goal of the NCAA and subsequent member institutions. The focus on revenue generated for the NCAA is evidenced through the lived experiences of the participants, stating they felt like they know their existence wasn't as important to their institution as the male student-athletes who participated on revenue-generating sports teams. For example, the statistic noted in Chapter Two indicates how in 2013 certain

Division One institutions earned revenue exceeding \$25 million from their football and men's basketball programs (Bass, Schaeperkoetter, & Bunds, 2015).

The findings also illustrated some gaps in the literature. Little to no research has been done of the student-athlete and coach dynamic, including trust and education received.

Additionally, little to no research has been done on the mandatory education required from the NCAA for student-athletes in regards to policies and procedures. As both trust in coaches and the lack of education surrounding policies were significant aspects of the themes, the lack of literature surrounding those lived experiences reflect a need for additional research to be completed.

Limitations

Despite efforts to recruit diverse gender identities to participate in this study, none of the four participants identified as transgender. While there was diversity in their institution, sport, region, scholarship status, and residency, they all identified with being cisgender women with three out of the four participants identifying their pronouns as she/her/hers (one participant left the pronoun box blank on the demographic information form). This limits my study in a number of ways. First and foremost, looking at cisgender women as the only marginalized gender identity is exclusionary to transgender student-athletes; for transgender men, transgender women, and gender-neutral student-athletes. All participants were still provided with the *NCAA Inclusion of Transgender Student-Athletes* publication but no one was truly able to attest to how that publication would have affected their lived experiences. That document did come up in the interviews, as participants expressed that they were both surprised and appreciative that the NCAA had a publication addressing athletes who identify as transgender.

Although not the purpose of this qualitative study my findings cannot be generalized across all student-athletes who may have marginalized gender identities. The findings are based on the data gathered from four participants and their lived experiences.

There were also limitations on the time I was able to spend recruiting participants and analyzing the data as a Master's student. While I feel as though the time I spent on each section of this thesis was adequate, as with all qualitative research I felt as though there was always more I could have done with data collection and analysis.

Implications for Practice

Based on the findings there are a number of implications for student affairs practice and higher education professionals. The action items for professionals include increasing and highlighting the importance of coaching education within the NCAA, and increasing not the amount of gender equity policies, but the transparency and accountability policies. Additionally, student affairs professionals and campus administrators should analyze the treatment of women's athletic teams and programs, address overall campus climate including athletic departments, and increase the diversity of the representation of upper level athletic administrators.

Participants cited trust in their coaches as primary reason they didn't feel like they had to worry about policy. This reliance on the coaches to interpret and implement policy indicates a need for both institutions and the NCAA to improve their coaching education programs. Currently, there is little mandated of NCAA coaches in regards to education levels and certification processes in order to coach at the Division I level. Every Division I and Division II coach must pass an annual certification test. But, this test only asks questions surrounding recruiting policies. NCAA coaching education is lacking in regards to gender equity policies and Title IX compliance. Additionally, if the Larry Nassar situation at Michigan State University is

any indication, coaches need additional education on how to approach issues of sexual misconduct including sexual assault, sexual harassment, and mandatory reporting. Increasing the coaching education about policy is paramount to protect and better serve student-athletes with marginalized gender identities if they are turning to their coaches as their main resource for policy information.

Second, the findings of this study show that the policies surrounding gender equity are minimally serving student-athletes, however the participants expressed a desire for greater accountability and transparency surrounding gender equity policies and how they were made available and implemented at their institutions. For student affairs and higher education professionals, this means that new policies and policy revisions need to be centered on the institutional transparency and accountability of these policies, in addition to the three prongs of Title IX compliance. Institutional transparency and accountability of these processes includes the need for more intentional implementation and enforcement strategies, and additional education on how policies affect student-athletes. One of the participants even expressed how she felt her institution was “dumbing things down” in regards to policy education. This doesn’t really create an environment where one feels their institution is supporting their identities if everything happens behind the scenes, which can lead to a sense of being marginalized due to the lack of explicit support. Increased intentional transparency and accountability practices as an implication for practice can be implemented at all levels of student affairs and across different functional areas. As professionals, when we develop policy we need to be able to ask ourselves is this information made public for the students that we serve, and why or why not? Additionally, when developing policy we need to be able to ask ourselves how we will be held accountable at

upholding these policies, and what the consequences there would be if the policies are not implemented effectively.

Higher education professionals, including student-affairs professional and athletic administrators working with student-athletes, should assess both campus and athletic department cultures in regards to the treatment of women student-athletes. Addressing campus climate surrounding the treatment of marginalized gender identities is no easy task. For student affairs professionals, this can manifest in any number of ways. To begin, it can start with one's own individual behaviors and actions towards marginalized gender identities. How does your office promote inclusivity? Are you fully aware of the programs and services available at your institution in regards to a potential Women's Center, LGBTQA+ Resource Center, Title IX coordinators, and/or institutional policy surrounding mandatory reporting? Changing campus climate and analyzing athletic department culture in regards to the treatment of marginalized gender identities including cisgender women, transgender students, and gender neutral students can be challenging, but showing support by attending events and educating yourself on policies and resources or asking women student-athletes themselves, is always a good place to start before addressing overall, systemic changes. Asking women student-athletes about their experiences through focus groups, surveys, or exit interviews is encouraged.

Finally, institutions and athletic departments need to make an effort to improve the diversity and representation of upper-level athletic administrators who do not identify as cisgender men. Student-athletes with marginalized identities, and not just marginalized gender identities, need to feel the individuals developing and implementing policy understand their experiences. The most effective way of creating policies that are actually supportive of the diverse populations of student-athletes at your institution is by ensuring you have a diverse staff

in direct contact with those policies. Representation matters, across all functional areas and levels of not only athletic administration, but higher education overall.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are a number of areas for future research that should be addressed related to gender equity in college athletics. First and foremost, to address the most pressing limitation of this study, more research needs to be conducted on the lived experiences of transgender student-athletes. There are transgender student-athletes participating across all levels of education, from high school student-athletes through NCAA Division I athletics. Addressing their lived experiences, in particular exploring whether or not they feel NCAA and individual institutional policy is adequate enough to support their gender identities and expression, is vital in the work for gender inclusivity. Additionally, further qualitative studies are needed in regards to the experiences of transgender students on college campuses in general, and analysis on campus climate and campus culture. Currently, the NCAA does not keep track of transgender or gender neutral student-athlete participation rates, as their annual reports on gender equity still highlight the gender binary by only sorting student-athletes into “male” and “female” categories. While the NCAA has published documents surrounding the inclusion of transgender student-athletes, there are still significant barriers to inclusion, both systemic and from a cultural standpoint.

All of the participants in this study came from Division I, Power Five institutions and further research would be useful to investigate if campus climate and the effectiveness of policy is similar at Division II and/or Division III institutions. While it doesn't seem like the lived experiences would differ drastically if the behaviors and attitudes directed towards female student-athletes at Division I institutions are significantly impacted by the importance placed on revenue-generating sports, perhaps the campus climate and athletic department culture would be

different at institutions where there are no revenue generating teams or sports. Division II and Division III institutions have significantly less revenue generating potential, from even their football and men's basketball teams, so exploring the experiences of their student-athletes in regards to their gender identities would be important to analyze if there is a connection based on the impact of revenue generating teams versus campus climate overall, outside of the athletic department alone.

Further research could also be done on the barriers to female representation within upper-level athletic administrator roles. Traditionally, those who have held the roles like athletic directors have few marginalized identities (i.e. heterosexual, cisgender white men) and further exploration is needed to determine why that is still the case. What explicit and systemic barriers are there for diverse females obtaining roles in upper level athletic administration? What implicit biases exist in regards to the lack of representation within higher education administration as a whole?

Finally, research that would support the findings of this study would also entail research on the effectiveness of NCAA sanctions. With NCAA compliance departments and scandals currently in the national spotlight, longitudinal studies on the effectiveness of sanctions would be necessary to evaluate the accountability of NCAA policies. In the case of Penn State and Title IX mandatory reporting, recruiting scandals and paying players to play or attend certain institutions, or scandals surrounding the lack of academic standards, it would be important to understand the impact of those sanctions and punishments on those institutions.

Conclusion

This study sought to explore how NCAA policies had an impact on the lived experiences of student-athletes with marginalized gender identities. Four former student-athletes, all

cisgender women but from a variety of institutions, residency status, scholarship status, and sports, shared their stories with me. Their undergraduate experiences as Division I student-athletes all contained rich examples of the things that they loved and took away from their years competing, and things that found to be draining. All had experiences that revolved around their gender identities, whether that involved policy or not. Eight interviews and over five hours later, three primary themes emerged from their experiences. Those themes included how they felt policy at the time didn't play a large role in their day-to-day experiences (but could see that role more in hindsight, the burden of being a woman on a college campus in general and within an athletic department, and a theme emerged discussing what educational and life skills programming did or did not exist from the athletic department. Implications for practice included increasing the amount and importance of coaching education on gender equity policies, increasing the amount and importance of policies surround institutional transparency and accountability, addressing the revenue potential of women's athletic programs, addressing campus culture overall for how your institution treats those with marginalized gender identities, and increasing the diversity of those whom are within upper-level athletic administrator roles. Recommendations for further research included expanding qualitative research on the lived experiences of transgender student-athletes and how they evaluated the inclusivity of their institution. Additional options for further research included analyzing the campus climates of Division I and Division II institutions, exploring the barriers to diverse women obtaining professional roles within upper-levels of athletic administration, and research the long-term effects of NCAA punishments and sanctions.

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Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

December 15, 2017 - official approval letter

Lauren Kelba
Department of Educational Administration
1420 D St Apt C2 Lincoln, NE 68502

Corey Rumann
Department of Educational Administration
TEAC 129, UNL, 685880360

IRB Number: 20171217662EX

Project ID: 17662

Project Title: Marginalized Gender Identities and NCAA Policy

Dear Lauren:

This letter is to officially notify you of the certification of exemption of your project for the Protection of Human Subjects. Your proposal is in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance 00002258 and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46) and has been classified as exempt.

You are authorized to implement this study as of the Date of Final Exemption: 12/15/2017

- o Review conducted using exempt category 2 at 45 CFR 46.101
- o Funding: N/A

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:

- * Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;
 - * Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to recur;
 - * Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;
 - * Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others;
- or
- * Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.

This project should be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines and you should notify the IRB immediately of any proposed changes that may affect the exempt status of your research project. You should report any unanticipated problems involving risks to the participants or others to the Board.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 402-472-6965.

Sincerely,

Becky R. Freeman, CIP
for the IRB



Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

Title of Research Study: Marginalized Gender Identities and NCAA Policy

Primary Researcher: Lauren Kelba, University of Nebraska – Lincoln

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

You have been identified as a current or former NCAA student-athlete by an athletic professional in your network. If you feel as though you have a marginalized gender identity (cisgender woman, transwoman, transman), I want to hear your story.

Why is this research being done?

This research is being done to ensure that policies surrounding diversity and inclusion in regards to gender are effective at supported the lived experiences of student-athletes from whom those policies affect.

What else should I know about this research study?

Whether you choose to take part or not is completely up to you- it will not be held against you in any way. You can agree to participate and change your mind at a later date. There are minimal risks when it comes to participating in this study.

How long will this research last?

If you choose to participate in this research project, you will be asked to complete two interviews lasting approximately an hour.

What happens if I agree to participate?

If you agree to participate, the primary researcher will contact you soon to schedule your interview.

What happens to the information collected for this research?

The interview will be audio recorded. The data on that audio recording will be transcribed by the primary researcher and edited for privacy purposes (changing names, institutions, sports, etc).

Consent

To submit this Google Form, you must click the “I Agree” button at the bottom of your screen. By clicking the “I Agree” button you are consenting to being contacted by the researcher to set up an interview.

Appendix C: Letter of Solicitation Template

Dear Prospective Research Participant:

I invite you to participate in my research project, “Marginalized Gender Identities and NCAA Policy.” You are receiving this email as an athletic professional in your network has identified you as someone who may want to share their story.

Participating in this study will involve a brief Google Form, and two interviews that will last approximately an hour each. There is minimal risk that comes with participating in this study. You must be 19 years of age to participate. This research is designed to help inform athletic administrators and educators within higher education on how to best design, implement, and educate student-athletes around policy that affects those who have marginalized gender identities (i.e. cisgender women, transwomen, and transmen). By using interviews, a qualitative research method, my aim is to hear your story- if you feel supported and accepted in your athletic community, and how policy affects that inclusion. The interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed by the primary researcher only. Participation in this study is strictly voluntary and you are able to discontinue participation at any point in time.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please click here: _____ (hyperlink to Google Form with demographic information and informed consent).

If you have any questions about your participation in this project or the project itself, I encourage you to contact me at fye-lkelba@unl.edu or 319-594-5837. I would love to hear from you!

Respectfully,

Lauren Kelba
M.A. Candidate, Educational Administration
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Interview Questions

Introductions:

1. Introduce self, project's purpose, background, and current goals

“Hi there! Thank you so much for speaking with me today. My name is Lauren Kelba and I'm a second year Master's student in the Educational Administration and Student Affairs program at the University of Nebraska Lincoln. This research project is my Master's Thesis to complete my degree. As you know, this project is looking at marginalized gender identities, i.e. cisgender women, transmen, and transwomen, and subsequent NCAA policies. I'm looking to see how effective those policies are at supporting the identities of those for whom the policies affect. My background is actually in athletics- I was a student-athlete at the University of Iowa where I competed a springboard and platform diver for five years. I graduated in 2010 before coming to Lincoln.”

2. Confirm data from demographic questionnaire

“Just to confirm, you are (name) from (name)?”

3. Confirm informed consent

“I also want to remind you that are able to stop participating in the project at any point with no repercussions and that I've informed you that there are minimal risks to participating in this interview”

First Interview:

1. How did you get started in _____ (sport)?
2. What helped you make the decision to attend _____ (institution)?
3. Were you recruited to _____ (institution)? What made you choose that school?
4. What do you love about your student-athlete experience?
5. What do you not enjoy about your student-athlete experience?
6. What do you feel like you are gaining from your athletic experience?
7. Do you feel like you are missing out on anything being a college student-athlete?
8. How do you feel like NCAA regulations play into your day-to-day experience?
9. How often do you feel like NCAA rules, regulations, policies, and/or bylaws are talked about in your athletic environment?
10. Do you feel like there are any NCAA policies that are especially necessary? Or unnecessary?
11. How often does the concept of gender come up in your student-athlete experience, either formally or informally?
12. How do you feel like your gender has played a role in your experiences as a student-athlete at your institution?

13. In what ways do you feel your teammates, coaches, and athletic department are supporting your identities, gender or otherwise?
14. Are there ways you feel your identities are not being supported?
15. Have there been any specific accommodations you've needed to receive based off of your gender identity?
16. Are there other ways you feel like your gender influences your student-athlete experience?
17. Is there anything else you'd like to add about your day-to-day student-athlete experience?

Second Interview:

1. Great to connect with you again! How have things been since we last spoke?
2. Is there anything you want to touch on from our last interview? Anything to add, edit, or elaborate on?
3. By now you've been able look over some of policies, bylaws, and legislation published by the NCAA in regards to your identities. Any initial, gut reactions?
4. What's your opinion on Title IX?
5. Do you think Title IX could or should be improved? If yes, in what ways?
6. What's your opinion on the NCAA Recommendations for Practice in regards to female and transgender student-athletes?
7. In what ways do you think these recommendations could be improved upon?
8. Do you think the policies in place are adequate for cisgender female and/or transgender student-athletes?
9. How do you see these policies influencing your student-athlete experience?
10. Have you received any education on these NCAA policies?
11. What education did you, or would you, like to receive about these NCAA policies?
12. What recommendations would you make to athletic administrators in regards to removing or editing policies?
13. What recommendations would you make to athletic administrators in regards to additional policies?
14. Is there anything else from your experience as a student-athlete or opinions about NCAA policies you would like to share?