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INVESTIGATING STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY AND ACADEMIC
ENGAGEMENT AT A DIVISION I UNIVERSITY:
THE ROLE OF COACHES AND PEERS

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science
Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management

by
Olivia James
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Accepted by:
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STUDENT-ATHLETE IDENTITY AND ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT

ABSTRACT

Collegiate student-athletes are expected to balance academic and athletic requirements successfully. Student-athletes are required to attend rigorous practice sessions while maintaining the academic requirements for the National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) to remain eligible to compete competitively for their institutions. How well student-athletes find this balance depends on how they view themselves as students, as athletes, or as student-athletes. In addition, although many student-athletes aspire to play sports professionally, only a small percentage make this transition. Therefore, it is critically important to understand the potential ways to promote student-athlete identities beyond the field.

This qualitative study explored how student-athletes at a Division I University perceive their identity and how these perceptions influence their academic engagement. In addition, this study also examined how student-athlete relationships with coaches and teammates might influence these constructs. Interviews were conducted with a diverse sample of student-athletes (n = 19) representing all Olympic sports at this university. Grounded Theory was used to gather and analyze the data. The findings of the study revealed that student-athletes wanted to be remembered for their non-athletic contributions and they valued the importance of education; which was evident in their engagement level in their classes and degree program. Additionally, their coaches had a positive influence both in terms of academics and athletics, and they motivated those student-athletes with professional aspirations. Lastly, parental influence emerged as a theme as parents were very influential in instilling the importance of education in

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student-athletes during their formative years. Findings may have implications for student-athlete programming, preparation of coaches and professors, and NCAA requirements.

Keywords: student-athlete, identity, academic engagement, social identity theory, sport

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

According to Walter Byers, the term student-athlete was created by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) to convince workers' compensation boards, as well as the general public that players who play sports for a university are not professional players (Staurowsky & Sack, 2005). There needed to be a distinction between students and professionals who play sports to avoid any labor laws that may apply. Subsequently, the NCAA insisted that the term should convey the meaning that it was meant for, and "it was soon embedded into all NCAA rules and interpretations as a mandated substitute for such words as players and athletes" (Staurowsky & Sack, 2005, p.108). However, not every academic institution has reflected the "student-athlete" term and definition by the NCAA. Colleges and universities deemphasize the student aspect of the student-athlete term, leading to the strengthening of the athlete identity (Simons et al, 1999). Additionally, by emphasizing athletic identity, team cultures could develop that cause a further decrease in student identity (Bell, 2009). Even though the student-athlete term is conflicting because of the ideologies and beliefs associated with it (Stone, Harrison & Mottley, 2012), the collegiate student-athlete is still expected to meet the demanding task of balancing both the athletic and student role, each of which requires a huge time commitment. Due to this substantial time commitment and difficulty balancing both the athlete role and the student role, one role is often emphasized at the detriment of the other, with the student role more often devalued (Sturm et al, 2011).

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This situation has not deterred millions of high school student-athletes who still aspire to enroll in the NCAA athletics system. There are approximately 7,300,000 high school student-athletes, and of those, only 492,000 become NCAA student-athletes. That is, only six percent of student-athletes make the transition from high school to the NCAA, and a meager two percent of these young people make the progression to play sports at a professional level (NCAA, 2018). Yet, the aspirations among young people to play a sport, enroll in college, and play professionally are still high. It is imperative that academic institutions promote the holistic development and achievement of student-athletes. The NCAA emphasizes its commitment to promote the well-being of student-athletes and to provide them with the skills to be successful on the field of play and in life (NCAA, 2018). One of the NCAA's core values is to support the role that college athletics play in the mission of educational institutions emphasizing a design in which individuals would participate in athletics as an activity outside of their main obligation of being a student, while balancing their social experiences (NCAA, 2018). However, while there is a growing body of literature around the student-athlete experience (e.g., Adler & Alder, 1987, 1991; Bell, 2009; Marx, Huffman, & Doyle, 2008; Meyer, 1990; Miller & Kerr, 2002; Sturm, Feltz, & Gibson, 2011), there is not sufficient evidence for how best to support student-athletes whole selves. Therefore, it is important to explore the diverse experiences of these young people.

Purpose statement

The purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which student-athletes participating in Olympic sports (i.e., non-football sports) at a Division I university

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perceive themselves as student-athletes. The study also sought to understand how those perceptions affected student-athlete academic engagement through qualitative interviews with a diverse sample of student-athletes at a Division I university. Specifically, the study investigated the influence of peers and coaches on Olympic sports athletes' on student-athlete identity and academic engagement. The outcomes this work can provide evidence to advise administration, faculty, and staff responsible for student-athlete programming at this institution.

Problem Statement

Even though student-athletes are expected to perform well both academically and athletically, amidst these stringent demands, being an athlete often takes priority over the student role for a number of student-athletes (Adler & Adler, 1987, 1991; Comeaux et al., 2011; Simons, Van Rheenen, & Covington, 1999). Killeya-Jones (2005) suggests that if student-athletes wish to succeed academically or athletically, they must resolve the conflict between the two roles, which cannot be achieved by rejecting either role.

This lack of balance can be most salient in high caliber student-athletes. When these student-athletes are afforded the opportunity to pursue their sport professionally and are offered profitable contracts to play (Simons et al, 1999), there may be a decreased emphasis on their academic interests, and such actions could strengthen the “athletic culture” on athletic teams (Simons, et al, 1999). Often, this emphasis on one role or identity over another is strongly influenced by the relationships student-athletes have with those around them, including their coaches and peers (Adler & Adler, 1987). Academic institutions, sports teams, classes, and friends can all play a role in

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encouraging and bolstering a balanced student-athlete identity (Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2014). If the contexts within which student-athletes participate solely emphasize success on the field, the likelihood of academic success is greatly hindered (Adler & Adler, 1987, 1991; Simons et al., 1999). When student-athletes invest more time and effort into athletics than academics, the latter may suffer. For example, Comeaux and colleagues (2011) highlighted the plight of Division I basketball players who were optimistic about their academic role; however, they soon encountered role conflicts due to their athletic obligations which inhibited their academic engagement on campus.

Academic engagement within the university setting is an important factor in a student-athlete's academic future. Academic engagement is a multifaceted construct as students can be cognitively engaged, emotionally engaged, and behaviorally engaged. Casuso-Holgado et al. (2013) suggest that students who have a high level of student identity will be more engaged and are more able to cope with academic stress than student-athletes with high athletic identity. These abilities, in turn, could lead to better well-being and feeling less burned out.

The current reality of student-athletes is that not many are afforded the chance to play professionally; therefore, we must ensure that their success beyond the field is building up their identities to be more than just an athlete. However, student-athletes face a lot of difficulties in finding balance as students and athletes, with often their student identity being sacrificed. An overemphasis on athletic identity may affect academic performance while in school but has longer term repercussions for student-athlete mental health and well-being when they transition to life after being a student-athlete (Houlberg

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et al., 2018). Therefore, it is important to better understand how student-athletes view themselves, in what ways are they engaged in the classroom, and what resources in their context might promote a positive self-identity and academic success. To this end, the present study sought to understand student-athlete's perceptions of themselves, their experiences in and outside the classroom, and the potential influences of their coaches and peers on their identity and experiences. Using qualitative semi-structured interviews and guidance from Grounded Theory approach, this study addressed the three guiding research questions below:

Research Questions

- 1) How do Division I collegiate student-athletes view their academic and athletic identities?
- 2) How do these perceptions of student-athlete identity relate to academic engagement?
- 3) What are the roles of coaches and peers in student-athlete identity and academic engagement?

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

This study aimed to explore student-athletes' perceptions of their identity and how the perceptions of their roles as student, athlete, and student-athlete might affect their academic engagement at a Division I university. Additionally, this study also explored the potential influences of their coaches and peers on these constructs. This literature review provides an overview of the theories framing this study, including Ecological Systems Theory (Figure 1; Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Further, research on identity development in student-athletes, a description of the tripartite construct of academic engagement, and evidence supporting the influence of coaches and peers on student-athletic identity and academic engagement is explored.

The first section of this literature review addresses the divisions within the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), the unique stressors faced by student-athletes, and the difficult transition from high school to college. The second section of this literature review intends to understand how identities are formed and how their immediate environments contribute to the development of their identity. This section, therefore, introduces Ecological Systems Theory and Social Identity Theory and how these two frameworks can be used to understand identity development and how individuals perceive themselves compared to others. The third section of this literature review explores academic engagement, in which the behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of engagement are reviewed. Finally, the fourth section provides an overview

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of several contexts that may influence college student-athlete identity and academic engagement. As student-athletes are away from home, their coaches and peers are often the most consistent and immediate influence on their development.

Stresses of Participating in NCAA Division I

There are three NCAA divisions: Division I, Division II and Division III. Among these divisions, Division I schools generally have the largest student bodies, manage the largest athletic budgets, and offer the most generous number of scholarships (NCAA, 2018). Universities who are a part of the Division I list of schools vow to provide their student-athletes with an extensive list of opportunities while committing to maintaining academic standards for their student-athletes (NCAA, 2018). A lot of money is invested in Division I athletics by generous donors and alumni of the institution. As a result, Division I schools award scholarships based on athletics to potential high caliber recruits who will have the ability to perform at the highest level of competition. With such a benefit, student-athletes often feel pressured to perform at their best and face various stressors when compared to students who are not members of a Division I athletic team.

Earning a full scholarship to a Division I university is a tremendous feat. Accomplishing such a feat often means that the coach and the university trusts and believe that you can be one of the best within the sport. However, student-athletes have a lot to overcome during their four-year journeys of becoming graduates within their sport, especially at a Division I university. Division I student-athletes often feel pressured to perform well in their respective sports. These overwhelming feelings over time eventually matriculate into feelings of stress, anxiety, or worry. Even though participating

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in sports may allow an individual to develop a purpose-based identity and positive mental and emotional health, athletes may sometimes feel despondent if they cannot measure up against their peers (Houltberg et al., 2018).

Not being able to measure up to other student-athletes may lead to bad health habits. Furthermore, just participating in athletics presents added stress for the student-athletes, another aspect of their lives that non-athletes do not experience (Wilson & Pritchard, 2005). Making that transition from an environment where daily activities were easier to manage to an entirely new system of direction and functioning can also be overwhelming for student-athletes. Stressors such as extensive time demands, loss of star status, injuries, and conflicts with coaches, among other factors, can be unique stressors for student-athletes (Wilson & Pritchard, 2005).

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

The environment plays a vital role in shaping one's identity. An individual's identity is shaped by all the systems that he or she interacts with over a period. Burke and Reitzes (1981) indicate that our identities are representations of who we are and that by communicating with other individuals, we better understand our own identity and who we are as individuals. In considering the contexts that might influence one's identity, Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1974) provides a useful framework. Bronfenbrenner (1974) likened the ecological environment to a set of Russian dolls, where each system is directly related and interacting with each other and the developing person.

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The environment in the context of this definition has acquired various definitions, but the individual is seen as the growing dynamic entity that progressively moves into and restructures the milieu in which he/she resides. Secondly, the environment influences the individual through a process called mutual accommodation. Thirdly, the environment is characterized as a crucial element to the developmental processes that is not limited to a single environment but is a collection of different processes that possess the capacity to have an effect from outside sources into the larger environment. Bronfenbrenner (1979) labeled the structures contained within the ecological environment as the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem.

The microsystem is defined by Bronfenbrenner (1979) as the direct environment of the child. This direct environment contains elements that the child interacts with on a direct basis such as their family, peers, church, and school environment. These direct surroundings play a significant role in providing the physical and mental support needed for positive development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Taking into consideration the surroundings of collegiate student-athletes away from the confines of their immediate family, they would mostly interact with their peers (classmates and teammates), coaching staff, faculty members, and their Athletic Advisor during their time at college. Therefore, their microsystem would look different from that of a non-athlete attending a university.

The mesosystem is made up of the interactions between two or more settings in which the youth is directly engaged (i.e., microsystems). For example, when exploring the lives of student-athletes, how their coaches and faculty interact or how their academic advisors and coaches interact may greatly influence the trajectory of the student-athlete's

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development. If these microsystems stress contrasting goals to the student-athlete (i.e., academics versus athletics), student-athlete development may be negatively affected.

The exosystem consists of contexts that indirectly influence the developing person. Although the individual does not directly take part in this system, the outcomes of these contexts affect the developing person (Bronfenbrenner, 1974). One example of how this system influences the student-athlete could be the initiatives that the university implements for athletic department staff. For example, a university may limit the amount of hours that specific university staff are able to engage with student-athletes or the amount. The university may also decide to change the specific tasks and assignments of employees. The work place of these staff do not directly engage student-athletes, but they may affect how student-athletes through their impact on university staff.

Finally, the macrosystem consists of cultural values, laws, and belief systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1974). One example of how the macrosystem influences the lives of the student-athlete are the regulations implemented by the NCAA, the organization which governs collegiate athletics. The regulations implemented by this body are meant to ensure that student-athletes are on a progressive path towards their degree while simultaneously representing their institutions competitively in their respective sports.

Even though the Ecological model consists of multiple systems that interconnect, I will focus on the interactions within the student-athlete's immediate environment (peers, coaches) and their influences on student-athletes. However, whereas my focus is on student-athletes' immediate environment (peers and coaches), the influence of other systems (athletic administration, academic advisors, professors, culture) on those

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proximal contexts are also considered. These unique interactions across the systems combine to understand better the lived experiences of the student-athletes.

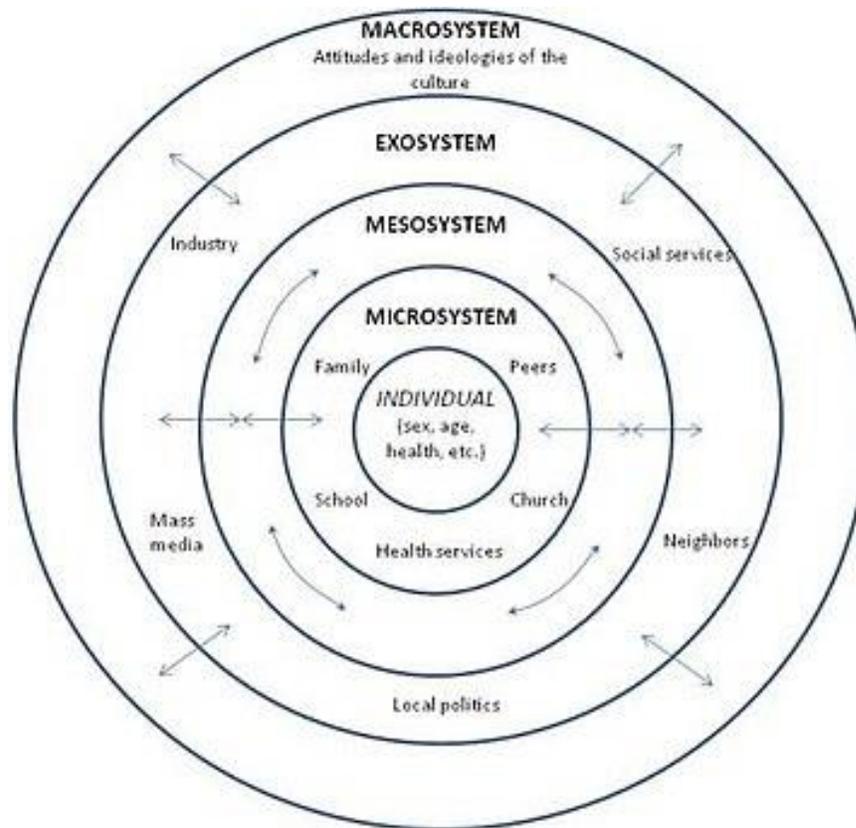


Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model

Social Identity Theory

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological model helps to identify the potential contexts that might influence student-athlete identity development. In that same fashion, the approach to student-athlete identity in this study is framed by social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Tajfel (1978) defined social identity as the awareness of the mental image one has of his or her own strengths and weaknesses that is rooted in the association of a social group or groups. This association is also important due to the

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emotional significance and the attachment to the association. As a result of the association to a specific social group, the concept of social categorization is the direct derivative of such motive. Tajfel (1978) further explained that the process of social categorization is a way of “ordering the social environment in terms of social categories” (p.69), hence, forming groups of people is a way that dictates an individual’s strata in society or in an environment that also gives meaning to the individual. Likewise, a social group helps members of groups know where they stand in social terms. Social groups have also been instrumental in the comparative aspect with other groups, whether they are defined as “better” or “worse” than other groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In that same fashion, individuals who are a part of the dominant group are referred to as in-group members, while those that are outside are called out-group members (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). In that same respect, members who are a part of the in-group recognize that they are similar in nature with other members of the in-group, but they also recognize that the differences between themselves and the out-group are very different. Some of these differences are their attitudes, beliefs and values, affective reactions, behavioral norms, and styles of speech, among others (Stets & Burke, 2000). Therefore, if an individual feels very strongly about a role, he or she behaves in a manner that supports that role or identity.

When students join the NCAA collegiate system, their student-athlete identity immediately moves to the forefront of who they are, potentially informing their behavior. The attitudes and habits of student-athletes can be influenced by their social environments and their association with a specific group. Furthermore, being strongly

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associated with a specific group has the potential to influence the student-athlete's confidence in their own self-worth and abilities.

Student-Athlete Identity

The student-athlete's identity, that is, a social categorization that situates their understanding of their place on campus. A student-athlete may primarily identify as a student, an athlete, or both. These identities may not be reinforced equally, however, and the student-athlete may invest more effort into one role over the other (Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2014). Yopyk and Prentice (2005) reiterated the fact that student-athletes should not only be seen for their exploits on the field, but that they should also be viewed as students, studying, and working towards a profession. With this emphasis, student-athletes might view this role beneficial to their futures in the longer term. Furthermore, student-athletes who portray a high level of student identity exhibit this role performance and identity in their daily activities (Bell, 2009). Moreover, if an athlete assumes the student-identity role, they will conduct themselves as such (Burke & Reitzes, 1981; Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2014).

Although this may be the ideal case, student-athletes tend to experience role-conflict and time constraints because they are unable to invest time and effort into their academics. Chartrand and Lent (1987) described role conflict as when the requirements of one role are inconsistent with the requirements of another. Student-athletes are faced with the daunting task of balancing their obligations simultaneously, but to effectively be successful at either task, compartmentalizing could be practiced (Settles et al, 2002). Killea-Jones (2005) suggested that a) both the student and athlete role must be

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independent of each other; b) the student-athlete must have adequate time to finish classroom assignments; c) institutions must create a climate where the student-athlete values both the academic role and the athletic role; and d) the academic services offered by the institution must be independent of the athletic services offered. Pritchard and Wilson (2005) reiterated the fact that the general student population including student-athletes must meet the universities' stringent academic criteria as this is also the requirement of the NCAA and the respective NCAA governed institutions.

There are, however, many factors that affect the likelihood that these principles are effectively implemented at academic institutions. Collegiate athletics is a multi-million-dollar industry that sports fanatics love and enjoy annually. Alumni invest a great deal of money into the success of their athletic teams as a result of them performing well in athletics. Additionally, by recruiting high revenue and high caliber student-athletes, universities can maintain their dominance and esteem (Simons et al., 1999). Therefore, the onus is on the coaching staff, but more so the student-athletes to invest time and effort into athletics to maintain dominance (Simons et al., 1999). Purdy, Eitzen, and Hufnagel (1982) and Griffith and Johnson (2002) indicated that due to the resources and opportunities offered by Division I universities, they are able to recruit the best athletes within the sport and present the possibility of them competing professionally after college. This type of behavior and culture further cultivates the "highly-committed" and the "over-committed" (Griffith & Johnson, 2002) attitude in student-athletes that exists in many sports-oriented institutions. Especially those athletic teams that foster a strong athletic team culture (Simons et al., 1999). This type of environment can create a

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negative culture where the focus is solely directed towards athletics, and less so towards a balance of the student-athlete role successfully.

Remaining committed to a role opens the student-athlete to opportunities to reinforce that role, and, as a result, reinforce those actions leading to role commitment. One example of reinforced role commitment is the example presented by Chartrand and Lent (1987), where student-athletes who have participated in sports for most of their lives gradually begin to reflect the role through their actions and ultimately begin to view themselves as athletes. However, such behavior may lead to detrimental effects on the student-athlete that may cause over-commitment in athletics that could cause the athlete to be in a position where their physical and psychological health may be at risk (Griffith & Johnson, 2002). In addition to the physical and psychological health risks (Griffith & Johnson, 2002), students who solely identify themselves as just athletes are often times at a disadvantage within the classroom due to demands of their sports (Simons et al, 1999) and lack of interest towards the student identity.

In a study by Purdy and colleagues (1982), college student-athletes who were awarded athletic scholarships that cover tuition and fees, room, board, and course related books felt they owed a tremendous amount to the university and must repay their debts with their athletic abilities. With such an emphasis being placed on college athletics, the student role “no longer spearheads the conversation” (Purdy, Eitzen & Hufnagel, 1982, p. 445). In addition, Aries, McCarthy, Salovey and Banaji (2004) suggest that upon entering university, student-athletes are already at an academic disadvantage because of the negative stereotypes geared towards their academic abilities. Due to these actions, the

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athlete identity is reinforced more, which in turn, encourages and bolster their hopes of becoming a professional athlete within their sport irrespective of the likelihood of achieving that goal, and reduces their likelihood of being fully engaged academically.

Academic Engagement

Researchers Axelson and Flick (2011) defined academic engagement as the level of commitment and connection students have in their academics and the overall interest for learning in their classes. Student-athletes must realize the importance of engaging with their degree program and classes to make progressions towards attaining a college degree. Therefore, it is important that coaches and administrators understand the demands as well as the effort required by student-athletes to perform well in their courses in order to remain eligible to play, but also be prepared enough to earn a good job after retirement from the athletic field (Simons et al., 1999). For example, universities with the resources to support their student-athletes in a holistic manner often offer early course registration, tutor services and review services (Simons et al., 1999). To be successful, student-athletes are still required to be academically engaged by devoting time and showing interest in acquiring the knowledge and skills to excel in the classroom.

Types of engagement. The concept of academic engagement was developed to understand how well students are mastering course lessons (Dean & Jolly, 2012). Several dimensions of engagement are required to increase the likelihood that students will be successful in their academic endeavors. As a result, numerous researchers have devoted time generating various models of engagement that may bring about some understanding of the psychological needs of students within the context of the classroom. Fredricks,

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Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) and other researchers have identified three dimensions of engagement. They are behavioral engagement, emotional engagement, and cognitive engagement.

The first dimension of academic engagement is behavioral. Behavioral engagement is grounded on the importance of participation. It also entails completing class assignments and following rules and guidelines (Fredricks et al., 2004). An example of this type of engagement is when the student is involved in the class lesson (Finn, 1993). The second type of engagement is emotional engagement. This type of engagement is defined as the individual's overall attitude to the instructors, academic support staff, and classmates. It is also associated with their attitudes towards the institution coupled with their desire to complete course work (Fredricks et al., 2004). In that same fashion, researchers have likened this type of engagement to "Relational Engagement" (Davis et al, 2012) because it takes into consideration the students' emotional involvement in the learning process of whether they feel like they belong. Lastly, cognitive engagement takes into consideration the amount of effort invested in the course material, value placed on the material, and whether the student understands the material being taught (Fredricks et al., 2004). If the researcher wishes to measure a student cognitive engagement, it is important to first measure their commitment to learning the course material rather than wanting to earn a satisfactory grade (Fredricks, Blemenfeld & Paris, 2004).

Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (2000) mentioned how important it is for students to be engaged in their course work but were quick to point out that students might not

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grasp the course content immediately. Nevertheless, they must remain involved and be able to understand the class material being taught. To give an example, it is estimated that the world chess master requires between 50,000 to 100,000 hours of practice to reach the level of expertise (Bransford et al., 2000). Although performing well in class will not necessarily make a student the smartest, the example depicts how much effort is needed to be invested in a course lesson and the commitment required. The same experience can be likened to the experiences of student-athletes, as heightened academic demands are coupled with athletic demands and the uncertain likelihood of playing beyond college which reiterates the need for devotion of the student-athletes to their academics.

Microsystems of student-athletes: The role of coaches and peers in identity and academic engagement

Bronfenbrenner (1974) argued that to understand why humans experience changes or remains the same, it is important to understand the systems with which they interact. Therefore, by examining the systems in which the student-athlete interacts with on a daily basis (i.e., peers, coaches, classrooms), one may better understand their influences on the student-athlete's perceptions of themselves and their level of academic engagement. Student-athletes need support and motivation that will enable them to complete their collegiate career successfully while they are constantly being pulled in different directions by their athletic and academic obligations (Sturm et al., 2011). In order to prevent detrimental outcomes, a system must be implemented that will leverage the resources of these supports if a student-athlete is at risk for potential academic failure or other maladaptive outcomes (Simons et., al, 1999).

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Coaches' influence on student-athletes. Coaches play a vital role in the lives of their student-athletes. They spend an extensive amount of time developing their student-athlete's athletic abilities, but they are also paid by the institution to be competitive and win against other institutions (Naylor, 2007). Gould (2016) believes that coaches are more than just individuals who drill athletes weekly at practices. They also provide an environment where student-athletes can develop both emotionally and morally. Often, coaches can inspire and provide motivation, guidance, and encouragement towards their educational and career aspirations (Gould, 2016). Therefore, with coaches playing such an intricate and integral part of student-athlete's lives, it is imperative that they understand the immense responsibility that is placed upon them. To best promote balanced student-athlete identity development, institutions should invest in coaches whose approaches are centered around developing the student-athlete as a whole in supportive and encouraging environments where healthy coach-athlete relationships can be fostered (Gould, 2016).

The student-athlete's schedule is filled with both athletic and academic obligations. However, there are times when one role precedes another, and they face difficulties finding that balance. They are away from their families for an extended period on end, and the coach becomes that individual that has daily and consistent direct contact with their student-athletes. Therefore, it is also the responsibility of the coaching staff to not only reinforce athletic messages and encouragement, but to also reinforce positive academic messages to their student-athletes (Bell, 2009). It is also imperative that coaches take the academic responsibility of their student-athletes seriously, as this

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emphasis is reflected in the team culture, team environment, and student-athlete's attitudes. For that reason, Simons et al (1999) suggests that academic and athletic representatives should make a concentrated effort to create a balanced environment between academics and athletics.

Naylor (2007) states that "balancing to win" and "coaching for learning" is a matter that needs growth and advancement (p. 33). The institution expects the coach and their staff to perform well in their athletic endeavors while simultaneously developing strong men and women with character who will contribute to society. As a result, a significant portion of the university's budget has been allocated to the athletic department and athletic administrators. Hence, there is a great responsibility placed on athletic staff by way of athletic performances that their investment in the athletics programs are deemed worthwhile (Naylor, 2007). Nevertheless, the athletic department must take into consideration the requirements that are needed to develop a strategy to provide an equilibrium between academics and athletics as coaching for learning (i.e., focus on the competencies and lessons that athletics can teach) and coaching to win each has its place in intercollegiate athletics (Naylor, 2007). Coaches face the difficult task of finding the balance between the two when so much is placed on their agenda, and often, the lines are blurred. The complexity of reality when both learning goals and competitive outcomes are important exemplifies the art of coaching (Naylor, 2006). Furthermore, Naylor (2007) introduces the importance of coaching for learning and coaching to win, stating that each component had its place in intercollegiate athletics.

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Peer influence on student-athletes. Researchers have highlighted the isolation and distance present between the student-athlete population and the non-student-athlete body (Simons et al., 1999). Student-athletes sometimes endure various hardships and negative stereotypes that further separate them from the rest of the student body (Aries et al., 2004). Furthermore, their athletic obligations complicate the circumstance leaving them with little or no time to focus on academics or forming friendships outside of their athletic circle. According to Aries et al. (2004), this type of environment does not allow for positive reinforcement as they are deprived of the opportunity to develop personally by interacting with other social groups and participating in extracurricular activities.

Motivation affects the amount of time that people are willing to devote to learning (Bransford et al., 2000). Peer interaction could provide the motivation and the interest needed to perform well in college amidst all the negative stereotypes that are directed toward these student-athletes. Motivation through peer interaction could also lead to the development of friendships. Even though forming friendships is an important part of human development, student-athletes are often not afforded the opportunity to create and sustain these bonds with non-athlete peers due to their athletic obligations. For example, in a study of the academic experiences of 41 Division I- Football Subdivision (FBS) football student-athletes, nine of the participants noted that their fellow athletes played a positive role in their academic lives (Bell, 2009). Furthermore, it was discovered that some of the participants consulted their fellow teammates when they were considering changing their major. One player noted, “Your teammates push you and just because they want you playing and they feel that the team needs you and stuff like that” (Bell, 2009, p.

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29). Some participants in the study shared stories that showed deeper and stronger friendships and credited these to their academic success (Bell, 2009). When examining friendships with non-athletes, the participants highlighted that their peers motivated them and played a significant role in their academics. Because the athletic administration and student-athletes tend to be isolated from the general student body population (Simons et al., 1999), this type of support from student-athletes and non-student-athlete friendships appears to be very beneficial and valuable and, will be able to provide them with support through their academic journey (Crosnoe, Cavanagh, & Elder, 2003).

CHAPTER THREE

Method

This study followed a qualitative research design which is useful for researchers in natural social life where the data collected is in the form of text and captures the experiences of participants (Saldana, 2011). Specifically, this study employed Grounded Theory as an analytical method to analyze and categorize the data (Saldana, 2013). In this regard, Grounded Theory aims to use the participant's responses to form categories and subsequently link them to theories (Creswell, 2014).

This research design method was most appropriate for this research as the researcher sought to gather information on the topic and aims to get a deeper understanding of the topic to provide accurate and precise information. This study largely focused on how student-athletes perceive themselves (their identity), and how perceptions of their identity (their role as a student-athlete) affects their academic engagement. In addition, it explored how their peers and coaches influence these constructs and the relations among these constructs. Lastly, the study sought to uncover which identity is most significant to them and why. Discovering more about these experiences can play a key role in capturing their involvement and awareness of their scholastic journey.

The constructivist/ interpretivist paradigm was useful in this study as it clarified the psychological attributes of humanity (Chilisa, 2014). This paradigm seeks to understand the life experiences of individuals and how they view those encounters. Furthermore, this paradigm is also influenced by fundamentals of human experiences

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(Creswell, 2014). The ontological assumptions of the constructivist/ interpretivist paradigm are based on several concerns or notions that are placed in society that individuals have adopted (Chilisa, 2014) and are based on what the individual believes. However, one important factor to take in consideration is that the experiences shared within this paradigm are from the participant's personal experiences, thereby also considering the personal experiences of the student-athletes (Chilisa, 2014). Similarly, a student-athlete's college experience differs from a non-athlete's college experience; therefore, by getting an account of their experiences, the researcher may begin to understand more about their unique challenges.

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher used semi-structured interviews to collect data to address these aims. This type of interview is commonly in the social sciences because it allows the researcher to ask open-ended questions and usually entails a conversational aspect to it (Creswell, 2014).

Student-athlete participants were recruited from Southeastern University (a pseudonym) to take part in interviews. Southeastern University has a total of 11 NCAA governed sports, with 9 men's sports and 9 women's sports. To get a good representation of student-athletes, the researcher sought to interview a diverse sample of student-athletes from all sporting disciplines except for members of the football team. The university's football team was excluded from the study because participant recruitment and data collection were conducted in the Fall semester which would have posed a significant conflict with football student-athletes' schedules and playing season. Furthermore, the

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Football department has their own supportive resources; therefore, their experiences may differ from that of the extended student-athlete population.

A total of 32 (16 men and 16 women) reflecting the diversity of sports (two individuals from each team), year in school, and demographics of student-athletes at Southeastern University were recruited to be interviewed. To recruit student-athletes the researcher sought the help of a gatekeeper, who was responsible for Student-athlete Services and Performance. The Gatekeeper sent out a mass email detailing information about the study. The mass email asked student-athletes who were interested to sign up. This email also included a link to a google document to provide demographic information such as gender, class level, and sport.

The interviews were conducted on the second floor of the Student-Athlete Academic Building, a place where they would frequent for appointments with their athletic advisors or tutor sessions. At each interview, the researcher thanked the participant for taking part in the study, then encouraged them to take a few minutes to read over the details of the study. In addition to the brief demographic survey that the participant had already completed in the general sign up process, the selected participant was again asked to fill out another brief demographic survey (see Appendix C for Brief Demographic Survey). The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes (see Appendix D for Interview Protocol). Upon completion of each interview, the participant was compensated with a \$25 gift card for their time and participation in the study. The interviews were recorded using an audio device and transcribed verbatim using a

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professional transcription service. The University's IRB board approved all aspects of this study

Sample

The researcher used a stratified convenience sample of student-athletes who were currently enrolled at the university, and who were also active members of their respective athletic teams. As indicated, the researcher had aimed to interview two student-athletes per team. The researcher had sought to interview two males and two females from each sport (see Appendix A for Plan of Participation). This plan was aimed at obtaining a diverse sample and to get a holistic understanding and appropriate representation of student-athletes experiences across the board. Furthermore, for student-athletes to be included in the study, they must have been enrolled at the university for a minimum of one year. Therefore, no freshmen or first year transfer students were recruited to be a part of the study. This criterion was included in the study to ensure that the individuals had sufficient time experiencing being a student-athlete at Southeastern University, and that they understood the athletic and academic demands that were required. To maintain this standard, a two-step process was implemented. As indicated, the gatekeeper sent out a brief demographic survey to all student-athletes with the recruitment email. The researcher then selected 32 participants who reflected the diversity desired to sign up for an interview time most convenient to them. Table 1 presents the final sample recruited for this study. As can be seen in Table 1, there were 19 total participants: 6 males and 13 females. A total of 32 participants initially agreed to be included in the study, however, securing participation by all 32 was hampered by conflicting athletic/ academic schedules

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and no email responses and no interview sign-ups after the invitation email was sent. As a result, there were seven Sophomores, four Juniors, seven Seniors and one graduate student who agreed to share their unique student-athlete experiences.

Table 1. Sample Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Race	Level in School	Sport
Alexa	Female	20	White/Caucasian	Junior	Volleyball
Allison	Female	19	Black & Japanese	Sophomore	Softball
Amieke	Female	21	African & Caucasian	Senior	Women's Rowing
Anna-Kay	Female	22	Latina	Senior	Women's Golf
Brianna	Female	21	White/Caucasian	Senior	Volleyball
Chantal	Female	21	Black/ African American	Junior	Women's Soccer
Christina	Female	21	White/Caucasian	Senior	Women's Cross Country
Christopher	Male	20	White/Caucasian	Sophomore	Men's Track and Field
Harper	Female	21	White/Caucasian	Junior	Women's Soccer
Henrietta	Female	19	White/Caucasian	Sophomore	Women's Rowing
Jamelia	Female	21	White/Caucasian	Senior	Women's Cross Country
Junior	Male	20	White/Caucasian	Sophomore	Men's Soccer
Kellois	Female	21	White/Caucasian	Senior	Women's Basketball
Rushane	Male	21	Black/ African American	Senior	Men's Track and Field
Ruthlyn	Female	21	Black/ African American	Graduate	Women's Track and Field

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Tarran	Male	20	White/Caucasian	Sophomore	Men's Tennis
Yohan	Male	21	Asian	Junior	Men's Tennis
Zion	Male	20	Black & Asian	Sophomore	Men's Track and Field
Zoe	Female	19	Black/ African American	Sophomore	Women's Track and Field

Instrumentation

The interviews were semi-structured. This type of organization is formatted to give the participant the opportunity to openly share their experiences without feeling very restricted by the questions or the layout, while having order to the questions. The semi-structured format allowed the participant to speak openly without the restricting their responses. The researcher asked a line of questions to the interviewee, but additional questions were formulated based on the interviewee's response to create an ongoing conversation (Tyson, 1991). Additionally, the semi-structured format has other benefits because it helps to encourage richer responses (Tyson, 1991) from the interviewees. To reduce response bias, the researcher asked open-ended, non-leading interview questions and used neutral language when posing the questions (Creswell, 2014). See Appendix D for the full set of interview questions. These strategies among others were employed to ensure that the data collected were not influenced by the researcher.

During the semi-structured interviews, the researcher first asked general questions to briefly form an acquaintance with the participant. After which, the questions explored their identities, student identities, athlete identities and student-athlete identities. Furthermore, to understand their relationship and influences with their peers, coaches and

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their experiences in the classroom, the latter questions in the interview protocol aimed to investigate those aspects of their lives. Additionally, the questions pertaining to their experiences within the classroom sought to understand their level of cognitive, behavioral, and emotional engagement to understand their experiences on a deeper level. Therefore, to form a holistic understanding of the issues presented, the researcher sought to capture and better understand the overarching phenomenon by incorporating several viewpoints (Creswell, 2014).

Data Analysis

After conducting the interviews, the recordings were transcribed by a professional transcription service and submitted to the researcher. After which, the researcher checked the data for accuracy. This process involved listening to all 19 recordings while manually checking transcriptions for accuracy. If there were discrepancies in the data, the researcher then made the necessary corrections. This formative process helped improved data precision and validity of the interviews. It is also important to note that during the interview process, the researcher took time to record initial thoughts and ideas after each session known as a memo. Recording initial thoughts after each interview helped the researcher record initial emerging themes which helped the researcher to consolidate all the information (Atkinson, 2017).

A thematic analysis of the data was performed which included two processes: inductive coding and deductive coding (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The first round of coding included an inductive open coding, followed by a deductive theoretical coding that led the researcher to the themes (Saldana, 2013). The deductive process was important as the

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researcher had preconceived ideas about the responses which helped guide the coding process. For example, Synder (1985) presented the four types of commitment in student-athletes: Type 1-Scholar-Athlete, Type 2-Pure Scholar, Type 3- Pure Athlete and Type 4- Student-Athlete. It was formulated with the idea that student-athlete fit into one of these categories depending on their level of commitment to the role. In their study, Fredericks and colleagues (2004) found that student-athletes who show higher levels of engagement should identify more as a student or pure student. Lastly, the concept of the social identity theory and its correlation to the student-athlete identity focuses on the how the student views themselves in relation to non-student-athletes. Therefore, the stereotype narrative about the student-athlete body plays a role in how they are viewed on their campus. As a result, whether the identity is viewed as positive or negative; student-athletes may distance themselves from the group and join another group that fits their present-day character (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

The thematic coding process yielded several codes and themes relevant to the research. For example, Tajfel and Turner (1979) uncovered theoretical principles of their research one of which is the importance of achieving positive social identity which was evident in the responses received. As it relates to coach's influence on academic influence on student-athletes, Gould's (2016) research has shown that coaches not only encourage athletic endeavors, but they are also instrumental in encouraging high academic performances.

The first process includes submerging in the data, which includes acquainting yourself in data which involves "repeated reading" of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

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Throughout this iterative process, the researcher developed a deeper understanding of the interview responses, which allowed several overarching categories and themes to emerge during this course of action. The second step is generating initial codes or themes that seemed interesting to the researcher, examining each response looking for their unique perspectives across the interviews and formulating codes for each (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The third process is organizing initial codes into themes, which would result in overarching themes and their respective sub-themes. After these processes, the researcher sought to establish relationships between the data, research questions, and literature.

Validity

Validity is an important component to the research process. According to Neuman (2014), the definition of validity means “truthfulness.” Creswell (2014) noted that there are numerous opportunities for threats to validity to occur. Therefore, the researcher must ensure that any potential threats to the validity of the data collected that may arise are reduced as much as possible. The researcher employed the use of open-ended questions during the interviews to capture the participants’ opinions, thoughts, and experiences but that also allowed opportunities for answers to complicate issues (Neuman, 2014). The researcher asked broad questions to not direct potential responses. Another potential threat to the research was having a small sample size due to the study being a qualitative research study. To combat this, the researchers used the saturation point technique; this technique allows the researcher to identify a point to stop additional data collection when there are no more new themes arising. This point is also an indication that an appropriate sample size has been met (Kumar, 1996). Moreover, to maintain the validity and

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truthfulness of the data collected from participants, the researchers took handwritten notes along with the audiotaping of the interviews and used thick and rich descriptions to convey the findings of the research (Creswell, 2014). After each interview session, the researcher took a moment to write down any compelling details or thoughts that surfaced during the interview. Documenting important details in a timely manner ensured accurate data at the time of the audio recording. Furthermore, conveying such vivid description provided a fuller understanding of the participant's experiences (Creswell, 2014). To ensure accuracy, the researcher checked the interpretation derived from the interviews.

Reliability

Several measures were taken to ensure that the data collected had a high degree of reliability. After the data collection process, the researcher reviewed the transcripts to ensure that translations were free from errors (Creswell, 2014). Another threat to reliability that may pose a problem is the wording of the questions (Kumar, 1996); some participants may interpret the interview questions differently from others which may result in different responses. In such cases, the researcher sought to help the participants understand the questions by re-phrasing them in such a way that they were able to understand it and by asking probing questions. As mentioned before, the interviews took place in the Student-Athlete Academic Building, a place with which the student-athletes are familiar. To stay consistent with the interviews and the physical setting (Kumar, 1996), the researcher conducted all interviews in the same environment so as not to affect the reliability of the responses.

Subjectivity and Reflexivity

Subjectivity and reflexivity were taken into context so as to acknowledge the researcher's personal connection to the research topic. Being a black female from an international country where athletics is the root of our core, I was aware of how my personal experiences as the researcher could influence my perceptions. My perceptions and experiences could also be influenced by my own points of view. Our personal experiences play a significant part in shaping our subjectivity and how we view the real world, such that we group our experiences (Neuman, 2014). I have personal experiences and a connection with the research topic. Being an athlete all my life, I have aspired to pursue athletics professionally. However, there are times when I would place my identity as an athlete over my student identity, always taking into consideration the hours of rest needed to perform well in athletics. As a result, my academics suffered because of how much I invested into athletics and my desire to perform at my best. In a similar vein, I have witnessed many of my former teammates invest blood, sweat, and tears into the sport, only to be let down in the future after they have exhausted their collegiate eligibility and realize that the professional career they hoped for is unattainable. However, participating in sports in college has taught me how to deal with hardships and disappointments. I have also learned how to be persistent and to continue working towards goals. There is also one golden lesson that will always remain with me and that is to always plan, making your goals a priority, and use the resources and the supportive environment to your advantage.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

At the end of the coding process, overarching categories and subcategories were identified that addressed each of the research questions. Each sub-theme will be thoroughly discussed with the help of the literature and exemplary quotes from participant's interview responses to present our findings. The three research questions form the framework of these results. From the data analysis three overarching themes were found for research questions 1, 2, and 3.

Research Question 1: How do Division I collegiate student-athletes view their academic and athletic identities?

Analyses indicated that student-athlete identity is salient to respondents' behaviors and within the context in which they live. The student-athlete identity is multifaceted as they have the unique challenge of pursuing both their athletic and academic endeavors equally and successfully, while trying to portray and maintain a positive image to the world.

Using Social Identity Theory as the base of this research, the theory proposes that to portray a certain identity, the individual must act behaviorally, emotionally and physically according to the identity they want to represent. To fully understand student-athlete's perceptions of themselves, three overarching themes with their corresponding sub-themes were thoroughly discussed. The first sub-theme was balance of the student-athlete role, which expounded on the importance of maintaining an equilibrium for both roles and the outcomes for their futures. The second sub-theme was strengths of student-

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athletes, which identified how they wanted to be remembered, and the third sub-theme was athlete dress, which sought to explore student-athlete reasoning behind their style of dress and how that related to their chosen identity.

Balance of the student- athlete role

To be a successful student-athlete, it is important that the individual performs well in both roles simultaneously. Because both roles can complement each other, there must be a system in place to support both roles independently and collectively. Finding a balance between the two identities was the first step in strengthening these two identities and excelling. As a result, becoming a college graduate/achieving a career path was frequently cited as important to the student-athletes and is the first sub-theme. In their responses, the student-athletes highlighted a variety of avenues deemed as successful and their reason to maintain this balance. Henrietta, a sophomore on the women's rowing team, stated, "[Grades are]...very important, because a lot of it is riding on... with rowing, you have to be able to hold a good team GPA." This response reflected the importance of performing well academically to maintain their athletic scholarship. While NCAA coaches cannot remove an athlete from a team for athletic performance, they can dismiss them for poor academic performance. Henrietta seems to have a very good understanding of this rule and having good GPA is a good reflection of how the team values academics. Christopher, a sophomore on the Men's Track and Field team, shared their views on the detrimental effects it could have for life after athletics and their careers, "And like it's hard to be successful later on in life after the sports is over if you don't have the degree." Having shared his opinion, it is evident that Christopher

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understands the importance of education and acknowledges the hardships that could arise if a college degree is not attained.

To successfully balance both student and athlete role, student-athletes mentioned the importance of keeping both roles separate and only focusing on a role in the present. Most of the respondents viewed themselves as a student-athlete in their interview, and it is evident that achieving that balance is imperative for their success and, as such, they sought out ways in which they could balance the two identities. This view of achieving equilibrium was shared by student-athletes from multiple sporting disciplines, citing similar viewpoints regardless of their athletic teams. As a result, compartmentalization was cited as the second sub-theme. Compartmentalization is a system where student-athletes divide their tasks into separate domains making them more manageable (Settles et al, 2002). This can be achieved by focusing on the respective task in that present moment in time. Zion, a sophomore on the Men's Track and Field team shared,

Because I'm good at differentiating between athletics and academics, so it doesn't really carry over. If I'm doing bad in academics, it won't carry over to athletics. If I'm doing bad in athletic stuff, it won't carry over to academics.

Tarran, a sophomore on the Men's Tennis team stated, "No. Honestly, no. In the classroom it (athletics) doesn't affect me. I just pay attention to the professor. No, I mean, I know when to focus so it (athletics) doesn't affect me." Interestingly Zoe, a sophomore on the Women's Track and Field team mentioned, "I feel like track and school are different. I feel like it's more if I were doing bad in school it would affect track than track

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affecting my schoolwork,” firmly reiterating the importance of academics. This response suggests that these student-athletes perceive that academic performance may have a higher relevance to their overall well-being than athletic performance. Even though they identified as a student-athlete, this response shows a strong student identity.

Strengths of Student-Athletes

Participating in athletics had numerous advantages for character development and personal growth in general. Additionally, athletics created an environment where student-athletes can interact with positive influences in a supportive and safe environment. However, the student-athletes did not mention the benefits of the student-athlete experience but stated how they wanted to be remembered for their exploits outside of the student-athlete experience and role. Consequently, three sub-themes were most useful in describing the benefits of student-athlete experience. The first sub-theme that was highlighted was the need to be viewed more than just a student-athlete (well-rounded individual). A student-athlete who considered themselves to be a well-rounded individual not only focused on their athletic or academic endeavors, but they were also involved in activities within the local community or within their department major. They can use their skills and talents in other areas outside their student-athlete identity. It was emphasized several times that they wished to be known more and perceived for their efforts outside of athletics. Kellois, a senior on the Women’s Basketball team explained, “I wouldn’t just want to be remembered for just the athletic side of it. I do a Paw Pal mentorship and just walking into the classroom and seeing that girl smile...” While Kellois simply stated, “I wouldn’t just want to be remembered for just the athletic side of

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it. I do a Paw Pal mentorship and just walking into the classroom and seeing that girl smile.” Wanting to be known for more than just a student-athlete speaks volume to the character they wish to portray to others. This counteracts the prevailing student-athlete image that existed decades ago – how student-athletes have no interest in the classroom (Alder & Alder, 1985; Simons et al., 1999) and in academics and who were solely pursuing a path to play professionally.

The second sub-theme identified was good character. Student-athletes were expected to showcase their institution in the best light which involves behaving in a respectable manner. Therefore, showing good character can be reflected in the way a student-athlete acted, thought, and felt in a socially acceptable manner. However, good character building took time to develop and continued to build when student-athletes faced challenges. Aside from excelling in their respective sporting disciplines, the student-athletes were genuinely concerned about their representation off the field of play. When asked how he wanted to be remembered for his time in college, Yohan, a Junior on the Men’s Tennis team replied, “... very good person. That comes first, I really care about people’s opinion about how I am then that’s it, if I’m a good person or not,” while Allison, a sophomore on the Softball team said, “I want to be remembered by like doing the right things all the time, having good character.”

Lastly, gaining leadership skills was highlighted as the third sub-theme. Student-athletes echoed that they have gained leadership skills during their student-athlete experience. Zion stated, “I want to be remembered as of course, an ambitious person. Also, a positive person and a leader of course;” while Anna-Kay, a senior on the

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women's Golf team said, "I want to be, remembered as somebody that led by example...look up to me for not just my golf game, but for who I am as a person."

Athlete Dress

Consistent with social identity theory, a student-athlete's style of dress was a very important characteristic that helped to reflect their identity (Tajfel, 1978). Whether individuals are a part of the in-group or out-group signifies their association with such groups, which in turn, influences their behaviors, and ultimately, their identity. Individuals who are a part of the in-group (i.e., student-athletes) share the same behavioral norms (Stets & Burke, 2000), which could include style of dress. Mode of dress was included in the interview protocol because Southeastern University's athletic-themed attire included the logo of their respective athletic department in the respective team colors, paired with the university's brand sponsor. It could also be hypothesized that a student-athlete who wore athletic-themed clothes is likely to have a higher athletic identity than an individual who did not.

During the interviews, several student-athletes mentioned that they wore their university-themed clothing for comfortability. Junior, a sophomore on the Men's Soccer team stated, "Just the athletic gear they give us. Just because it is comfortable and when I wake up early in the morning for practice," While Zion stated, "anything that's comfortable like sweatpants, slippers, and a hoodie." The need for comfortability allowed the student-athletes to dress in loose-fitting clothing. Convenience was also a common sub-theme that emerged. Convenience can be described as the ease in which the student-athletes could get dressed in the morning without any unnecessary hassle. This sub-

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theme was evident throughout the interviews and was reiterated by Christopher and Ruthlyn; Ruthlyn is a graduate student on the Women's Track and Field team. Student-athletes have a busy schedule; from waking up in the morning for classes to having tutors in between, then having to go to practice in the afternoon and then possibly another tutor session. At nights, they had to complete homework and have dinner before retiring to bed shortly, only to repeat this hectic schedule the next day. With such limited time during the days, being already dressed for practice was just one less thing to think about. As a result, having the ease of leaving from class for practice already dressed could lessen some the stressors. Both Christopher and Ruthlyn shared the same viewpoints.

Christopher stated,

Because usually what happens is right after school's out, I have to go to practice anyways, so it's easier to just go wearing Southeastern University stuff that I would wear for probably practice and then I don't have to spend as much time changing" while Ruthlyn said, "It's just more convenient to wear athletic clothes and then go straight to practice. Instead of going home and changing, then going to practice.

Alternatively, Harper a junior on the Women's Soccer team shared a contrasting viewpoint, opting to create a distinct separation from her athletic identity. She shared,

I don't love the look of...I'm an athlete. Look at me. Honestly, I hardly ever wear Southeastern University athletic stuff to class, just because, I definitely did my freshman and sophomore year, but I think that this year, I just... I don't know. I've wanted a little more separation from my identity as an athlete. I don't know. I

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just think people have stereotypes against athletes. All I see are athletes. When we're in practice, and we have tutoring, if you have a class, you sit with your athletic friends, and I guess I just try and minimize that as much as possible, because I've met a lot of people outside of athletics, and we don't talk about out score every single second of the day I don't like screaming. 'I'm an athlete, so I don't wear the gear.

In addition to wanting to create that separation from the student-athlete identity, there are also numerous themes that emerged from Harper's response. She highlighted identity development when she spoke about wearing Southeastern University's athletic themed attire her freshman and sophomore year but came to a different understanding of herself during her Junior year. Harper may have chosen to create a different narrative and identity of what was more important during that time. This change came after she endured multiple athletic injuries, family issues and interactions with members of the non-student-athlete body, and her athletic identity lost its meaning. Additionally, Harper also mentioned how the friendships created outside of athletics helped her cope with her situation by not engaging in athletic discussions. This response showed how important peer support, a theme discussed later in the paper. helped in increasing self-esteem, self-confidence, and bringing out positive feelings.

The viewpoints shared by Harper were unique and introduced an alternative viewpoint. Whereas other student-athletes simply mentioned the aspect of comfort and convenience, this student-athlete had different sentiments and spoke boldly about the meaning of the athletic gear and how her obstacles changed her student-athlete

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experience. Several student-athletes also expressed that they liked to wear their own clothes to show their personal style and to reduce the repetitious code of dress expected from this unique sub-group. Showing their personal styles could also indicate that they understood that wearing Southeastern University's athletic themed clothing is reflective of their athletic identity. Jamelia, a senior on the Women's Cross-Country team shared,

Actually, not athletic clothes, which I feel a lot of people do, just because I wear athletic clothes so much when we travel and then so much when I'm just home.

I'll just wear leggings some days or jeans some days, it just kind of varies.

Others likened Southeastern University athletic issued clothing to a uniform and not within their clothing rotation, Rushane, a senior on the Men's Track and Field team stated, "My normal fit (i.e., clothing outfit). I have usually a black shorts or a black shirt, a black hoodie, and then my white shoes. No, it's not Southeastern University themed based, no. It's just straight (simple)," while Harper stated, "Honestly, I like dressing up. I would consider this just casual. A plain sweatshirt and leggings. I don't know. I don't really wear anything... I'll wear Southeastern University stuff, I guess once in a while. But mainly this year, I've been wearing my regular clothes." This comment came after student-athlete Harper earlier distanced herself from her athletic identity. One important element to note was the reference to their personal clothes and regular clothes, suggesting that Southeastern University's athletic-themed clothing was viewed differently than clothing student-athletes would typically choose to wear. Additionally, Harper is a junior who will be graduating in less than a year; she wears non-athletic themed clothes to help with preparing her to leave the student-athlete community.

Research Question 2: How do these perceptions of student-athlete identity relate to school engagement?

Academic engagement was an important element to facilitate student-athletes' progression toward their degrees and to hone the skills to be successful within their career field and society. All the participants expressed to the researcher that they were engaged in their classes and degree program. Furthermore, when asked how engaged they were in their class on a scale of zero to 10, most responded with an answer of eight. The analysis of responses also revealed that these student-athletes were engaged in all three types of academic engagement: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement.

Behavioral Engagement

Behavioral engagement deals with the idea of active participation within the classroom that includes class participation and completing class assignments on time. Most of the responses indicated high levels of behavioral engagement which is not reflective of the stereotypical narrative associated with student-athletes. When asked to list ways to show behavioral engagement, Ruthlyn stated, "Usually, I sit in the first couple of rows in class. Often, I take notes on pen and paper instead of typing up my notes. I just feel like I retain information better by writing, or I'll print out the PowerPoints with little notes on the side" while Alexa, a junior on the Volleyball team stated, "I guess my grades show that I'm paying attention, studying outside of it. I always participate. I ask questions." However, Zion simply stated, "By listening mostly, taking notes, or just being attentive." These exemplary quotes given by the student-athletes shows that they value and recognize the importance of being attentive in class.

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Rushane shared a unique perspective from the other respondents. Unlike the other student-athletes who seemed to be attentive in class and seemed to understand how important being an active participant is, Rushane expressed a more a lackadaisical approach towards his education and simply wished he did not have to attend classes. However, Southeastern University has implemented a class checker system for their student-athletes to deter such behavior. While Rushane may be unwilling to attend, the team rules and punishment system in place could be the driving factor in his class attendance and not attending because of its importance to his future. This viewpoint completely contradicted the other responses and raised concern about the origin of this way of thinking. Rushane stated:

I'm wanting to get through the class. That's the main purpose of it. I mean, we go to class to basically get passed it. Honestly, if the professor was just like, 'You passed my class, I wouldn't show up So, it's just all we're doing is just going in there just to get a passing grade, but listening to a professor just go on and on and on about something that may not make sense and you could find a little. It's like there's no point. It's just too much.

Emotional Engagement

Emotional engagement deals with the individual's attitude regarding their professor, classmates, tutor, or academic advisor. It also entails their overall attitude towards the completion of classwork and how they feel about their institution. As a result, if student-athletes feel like they belong within their environment, their academic engagement should be high, they should have the desire to do well academically. Kellois

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expressed her willingness to seek help from the professor if needed. This response completely went against the student-athlete narrative found in the literature (Alder & Alder, 1985; Simons et al., 1999), which states that they are uninterested in college. Additionally, change in behavior could also be attributed to the message that universities and the NCAA are broadcasting, placing emphasis on the student aspect. Lastly, these actions could also indicate that they feel connected to the institution and have a sense of trust and positive relationships that exists with their professor where they feel comfortable to seek out help. Kellios stated,

If I had a question or concern about something, I would definitely go talk to the teacher or the professor about that. When I didn't make a good grade on a test, I went and talked to her and was like, 'What do I need to do to get better? How can I improve this?' So I'm always trying to... They're going to help you. So, if you use them as your resources then you should improve.

Jamelia acknowledged the time commitment professors invest in their students, "They're (professors) taking the time to be there and spending their time to teach... they definitely try to know you, try to help you and benefit you," and Harper expressed her enthusiasm about learning the course material within their degree program,

Class is class. But I think now that I'm done with the General Ed stuff, and I'm finally moving into things that I can see myself using, I'm excited, but yes, I just feel like it's going to be useful, so I feel more inclined to study and pay attention to it because I want to use it.

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Alternatively, there were student-athletes who did not share the same viewpoints, student-athlete Rushane detailed when asked if they thought their teachers cared about them,

Some do; some don't. Yeah, I'll say some do, some don't. I would say some do because they are worried about getting... How can I say it? Some don't. If I were just a number to some of them and some do because they really want us to know the information that what's going on because they're really passionate about the research field.

Cognitive Engagement

Cognitive engagement deals with the idea of how invested the student-athlete is in their academics. It also encompasses the value placed on the coursework, value placed on the material and whether they understand the lesson. When asked if they felt like school is important to their success, Anna-Kay stated,

Yes, definitely. Probably just because it's making me more knowledgeable person overall. So I mean, I know some classes will have nothing to do with me, but I'm sure I'm taking a little bit of information from each class, I'm taking, and it just making me a more well off person, a more knowledgeable [person].

Amieke, a senior on the Women's Rowing team mentioned the low probability of playing professionally in her sport and instead stated the value of obtaining a college degree. Because many of the student-athletes who were interviewed came from non-revenue sports, the chances of them going professional is low unless they are performing exceptionally well. Non-revenue sports are athletic programs that do not generate an

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annual profit for the athletic department. As a result, they recognized that they would need to invest time and effort towards their academics to increase their chances of forging a career path. Amieke stated,

Because I don't plan on going pro any point in life. I don't think I could if I wanted to. And I think I knew that come freshman year because I'm too short. But so, I kind of knew there had to be something outside of just athletics. And I knew that, just coming from the family I come from, everything that I've learned when I grew up that you have to have like at least a doctorate behind your name or something, a doctor or a PhD.

Amieke's comments also alluded to how positive family influence was important to student-athlete identity and school engagement, a sub-theme raised in the latter section of the paper.

Lastly, Junior reiterated the importance of obtaining a college degree for their future, "I do. I think nowadays a college degree is important to have on your resume, so I do think that it will help with my future success." However, despite the popularity of collegiate athletics and the potential opportunity for student-athletes to play professionally, an overwhelming number of student-athletes still emphasized the importance of obtaining a degree. As a result, the importance of obtaining a college degree, having a successful career, and maintaining their athletic scholarships cemented their reason for valuing the importance of education. In addition, the student-athletes were very much aware of the consequences for their careers if they failed to be successful students. Both Amieke & Brianna shared similar viewpoints on the importance of

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obtaining a degree for their careers, Amieke stated “very important. Just for what I want to do (future job)”, while Brianna, a senior on the Volleyball team stated “... and I feel like it’s important for the future to getting a job.”

Research Question 3: What are the roles of coaches and peers in student-athlete identity and school engagement?

Coaches and peers played an important part in the development of the student-athlete. With the student-athlete being away from their immediate family members (parents, siblings, aunts, uncles), the coach and peers became that more consistent influence. As a result, three overarching themes emerged: Student-athlete friendships, coach influence, and parental influence.

Student-athlete friendships

During the interviews, the student-athletes were asked to identify who their friends were. An overwhelming amount cited teammates as their friends. As a result, the first sub-theme, friends with teammates, emerged. Brianna answered, “My friends? I’m really close with my siblings and then obviously my team are my best friends” while Junior answered, “I would say I have more friends within the athletic department.” Rushane who has had alternative point of views throughout this interview shared similar sentiments with his fellow peers. He spoke about forming friendships with individuals who understand the student-athlete experience: the busy schedule, early morning and late-night practices and the lack of a social life. “You’re dealing with people that are doing what you’re doing, so you kind of have similarity.” From a counter perspective, Harper viewed her source of friends differently and did not agree with her peers’

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opinions. Although she mentioned that she still had friends who were also student-athletes, she had come to the realization that she enjoyed interacting with non-student-athletes as well: “I’m just enjoying not being around athletes as much, but it’s really because I don’t want to have a conversation about soccer right now, because again, I’m just in a different situation.”

Friendships formed within the classroom also played an important role in the development of the student-athlete. Therefore, the sub-theme, friends with classmates, emerged. Due to their busy schedules, student-athletes were often unable to enjoy full social lives. Bonds formed outside the realm of athletics were important; however, they were challenging to sustain. Yohan stated, “I mean, I have friends on my team, other teams here at Southeastern University and a lot of friends who are just regular students and I have a great relationship with them” while Henrietta stated, “Yes, I do when I have group project. And I’ll see them very now and then in the hallways and be like, “Hey, what’s going on?” ...And sometimes I’ll have them as acquaintances,” hinting at the fact that they only interact with their classmates outside the classroom for group projects. Kellois highlighted the scheduling conflict between student-athletes and non-student-athletes, “Probably not as much with my schedule right now, just because we’re in season and we really don’t have that much free time, but the majority of the time I’d probably be with my teammates than those people,” alluding to the idea that they view non-student-athletes in a different strata of students.

The third sub-theme, peer influence, emerged. Peer influence and support was an invaluable resource that can offer student-athletes an avenue to express their emotions

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and improve academic development, support, and motivation during some of their lowest times. This sentiment was broadly shared by a few of the student-athletes during their interview sessions. Amieke stated,

They really challenged me to grow as a person, just outside my comfort zone....

I'm not a super talkative person. But they have really challenged me to be more like, 'Be more social and come out to dinner with us,' and kind of grow as a leader.

Junior attributed the positive influence of his peers to his developing character strengths stating, "I think they kind of helped shaped my values, things that I take seriously. Like I mentioned before, loyalty is a big one and I think my friends helped kind of instill that belief in me that loyalty is a very important part of being a good friend."

Christopher also mentioned the constructive role his peers played in his academic life stating, "They have definitely influenced me because they're all super, super smart, every single of them. And so, they definitely push me to do better and challenge myself."

Coach's Influence

Coaches play an important role in the lives of their student-athletes. Aside from developing their athletic abilities, they also play a role in their academic performance. As student-athletes are separated from their immediate families, coaches occasionally play the parental role in student-athletes' lives, thus creating a level of trust and understanding between the two individuals. When trust and understanding is developed, good communication skills could be the outcome of such partnership, with positive support and encouragement. Therefore, the first sub-theme identified is academic encouragement.

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When asked about the role coaches play in their academic life, majority of the student-athletes shared the same sentiments – their coaches always stressed the importance of academics and offered support. Jamelia described how involved her past and present coaches were in her academic life,

Well, since we've had two coaches, Coach Patton (a pseudonym) was definitely a little more involved. He would ask how things are going and then he really cared about our GPAs. It was encouraging because someone cared. So far with Coach Veena (a pseudonym), not much, but it has also been a couple of months.

Tarran shared how involved his coaching staff is in his academic life and stated, “We always have great talks about my academics, like the assistant coach ask me how I am doing and stuff like that, and encourages me to keep going.” Alternatively, it was the view of one student-athlete who expressed that coaches should not be involved in the academic lives of their student-athletes. They were of the viewpoint that the coach should not be involved with academics, and instead be concerned with what happens athletically. Rushane stated, “I would say his job is to make sure we're doing what we're supposed to do (in athletics), but his job isn't in the depth of what we're doing in class.”

In addition to the positive academic influence and accountability measures enforced by athletic coaches, athletic development was also the primary emphasis of coaches. Thus, introducing the second sub-theme; athletic/ professional encouragement. Student-athletes spend hours developing their athletic skills with the hope of pursuing their athletic discipline professionally in the future. Although a professional outcome may not be the outcome for most student-athletes, there were a few who expressed their

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desires to pursue their sport professionally. Their athletic coaches were the powerful motivational forces behind these mindsets. Brianna stated, “Well recently she’s (coach) been trying to convince me to play professionally after I graduate.” Anna-Kay shared the same experience with her coach,

She (coach) just expresses, sometimes, to us or to me personally that she does sees me as somebody that can pursue golf after college. She has talked about my potential as a golfer. My potential as a professional athlete that I can get somewhere if I put my mind to it.

Alternatively, Yohan explained how his athletic coach sought to use the collegiate years to build a foundation to play professionally by gradually improving his technique,

“For example, when we are developing a skill if I don’t perform well in the beginning they will say, ‘Don’t worry about it. You will do well in five or six months or a year or in two years. We’re building a better base for you even after you turn pro and graduate,’ so I believe they see how I play well in the long term.”

Reinforcements expressed above served as inspiration and motivation to work towards their professional aspirations.

In addition to the coaches and influences, athletic academic advisors were also a constant presence in the academic lives of the student-athletes. A few student-athletes mentioned the role their academic advisors played instead of their coaches. Yohan explained, “No they don’t have that. I decide those things, some on my own. I talked to my academic advisor, but I have a clear goal and plan for what I’m going to do.” While Harper stated, “No, I don’t think. I think he (coach) pretty much stays out of that. I think

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all of them (coaches) do. That's really for our academic advisor," in response to the influence of the coaches.

Parental Influence

Parental influence was highlighted as the third sub-theme within this theme. Parental influence was mentioned at multiple junctures throughout the interviews, playing an important part in the student-athletes' perceptions of themselves, their career goals, and the value they placed on academics. The student-athletes emphasized how education was manifested within their family home; Allison stated, "Very important (education). I mean growing up my dad really was a stickler about grades and how important they are. So me getting good grades gives me like fulfillment and likes makes me feel good." Similarly, Ruthlyn said,

My mom is a teacher, so school is really big in our house. Education is always put first, before any of the extra-curricular activities." Finally, Jamelia valued the educational investment her parents made towards her future, and stated, "It's very important just because I feel my parents are taking the time to help me be here... so I have to do my part of the deal by doing well in classes.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of student-athletes at Southeastern University. This study focused on how student-athletes view themselves, how their student-athlete identity relates to their school engagement, and the influence their coaches and peers have in their development. Based on the unique experience of the student-athletes, nine overarching themes were identified in relation to these three foci. The themes that emerged pointed to processes that helped student-athletes maintain a balance between their student role and athlete role throughout the four years of athletics eligibility.

Research Question 1: How do Division I collegiate student-athletes view their academic and athletic identities?

Student-athletes expressed the importance of balancing both their student and athlete roles. Striving to find balance for all student-athletes contrasted with prior research with student-athletes in which the athletes were classified according to their commitment to athletics (Alder & Alder, 1985; Lescrocat-Yukhymenko, 2014). Furthermore, the balancing of both roles proved to be a vital function of their collegiate careers, as it would help ensure that they were able to graduate college and paved the way for a successful career path. Therefore, becoming a college graduate and starting a career path was subsequently identified as a sub-theme. Many of the student-athletes understood that balancing both roles was significant for starting their career and, maintaining their athletic scholarship and acknowledged the consequences that could result. This emphasis

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is consistent with Meyer's (1990) work with female basketball players, which found that the female student-athletes believed that obtaining a college education would improve their ability to succeed in the future and correlated a strong relationship between college education and excellence.

To achieve such a balance, compartmentalizing various tasks must be practiced. Therefore, compartmentalizing was highlighted as the second sub-theme. It is important that the tasks and responsibilities are separated to excel in either role. The findings of the study found that separating the student role and the athlete role was a key aspect for the student-athlete to ensure that they perform at their best. Furthermore, one key point highlighted the precedence academics has over athletics. While literature on compartmentalizing academics and athletics in college student-athletes is limited, Settles and colleagues (2002) found that compartmentalizing activities served as a cushion that mitigated adverse encounters in another role. For example, performing well in academics may alleviate some of the stressors of performing poorly in athletics, if the student has a strong student identity. Settles and colleagues (2002) mentioned that separating tasks can make it easier for a student-athlete to concentrate on the challenges and responsibilities of each demand, thereby allowing them to excel in either role. As such, the application of such process was evident in the responses of Southeastern student-athletes and was consistent with the literature. Furthermore, the study also found that experiencing positive experiences canceled the negative experiences in other roles. This finding was likened to the viewpoint shared by the participants who explained that doing bad in their

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sport would not affect their academics and doing bad in academics would not carry over to their sport.

Through collegiate athletics, student-athletes can develop and build positive character as well as improve in their sports with many having aims to become professional athletes. However, our findings showed that student-athletes did not want to be remembered for their exploits on the field of play, but for being a well-rounded individual, having good character, and for their leadership skills. Athletics has been known to build character and foster well rounded individuals (Agans, Ettekal, Erickson, & Lerner, 2016; Weiss, 2016). Our finding has shown that student-athletes would like to be remembered for the non-athletic activities they made an impact in. Additionally, the image and character they portrayed to individuals around them was also important. This desire may be due to the culture and social norms that have developed around the expectations of student-athletes at Southeastern University, which influences how they view themselves and the behaviors in which they engage (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) Student-athletes could be influenced by the initiatives that the university implements for student-athlete service. For example, Habitat for Humanity, where student-athletes assist in building houses for needy families and the Paw Pals mentoring program in which athletes meet with elementary students weekly, are highlight promoted opportunities for student-athletes at Southeastern University.

The findings showed that student-athletes wanted to be remembered for their leadership skills, not only on the field of play but as individuals as well. They frequently spoke in ways in which they could be in service to their teammates. While our study did

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not focus on race, Comeaux and colleagues (2011) reported that black student-athletes exuded greater leadership skills than white student-athletes. This could be attributed to several factors such as their desired to be view differently and to be impactful within their community. Future research should consider how race/ethnicity and other demographic variables might be related to student-athlete perspectives at Southeastern University.

Clothing is an important aspect of representing an individual's identity. Our findings show that student-athletes wore university themed athletic clothing primarily for convenience and comfort. They shared their experiences about having the ease of making the transition from class to practice when they were already dressed and would rather be comfortable throughout the day. Most student-athletes did not express any discrepancies or the avoidance of wearing university athletic themed clothing for the fear of being recognized as a student-athlete. Furthermore, because social categorization orders society into social groups based on their characteristics, thus defining the student-athletes' place on campus (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), wearing university-issued athletic attire could possibly solidify how they are viewed on campus, thus adding to their privileged status.

Student-athletes preferred to show off their personal style by often wearing their own clothing. Our findings have shown that while some student-athletes preferred to wear university athletic attire, there are others who preferred to wear their personal clothing and not fall into a routine of the student-athlete stereotypical mode of dress. These student-athletes avoided wearing university issued athletic gear, and instead wore athleisure attire. One interesting point to note, was the choice of words used to describe

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university issued athletic gear. The choice of words used was indicative of them not viewing athletic clothing as “regular” clothing. Although they said they wore athletic themed gear for convenience and comfort, they recognized that wearing these clothes distinguished them as a student-athletes since they referred to their personal clothes as “regular clothes” or “normal clothes.”

One student-athlete shared a different view on clothing style from that of their peers. The opposing view spoke to the need to distance themselves from their athletic identity, and instead embrace their non-athletic identity more. They recognized how invested their daily schedules were based on athletics and ultimately tried to minimize their exposure to other student-athletes as much as possible. By realizing that they can engage in enriching conversations and friendships with non-athletes, they have now purposely not worn university issued athletic clothing to avoid stereotypes. Although Harris et al. (1974) have reported in their study that images of student-athletes dressed in their athletic uniforms were highly favored over those who were not, more recent work on the links between student-athlete clothing and identity from both the perspectives of student-athletes and non-student athlete peers is needed as this research was carried out in 1974, and the views of collegiate sports and student-athletes differ from those today.

Research Question 2: How does the student-athlete identity relate to school engagement?

Overall, the findings show that the student-athletes appreciated and valued their education. They answered the interview questions associated with each type of engagement positively, which showed that they understood the importance of being

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involved, reacting positively to their teachers and classmates and the willingness to learn class material. However, it is important to note that engagement may differ over time.

Overall, the findings show that the student-athletes had positive behavioral engagement in their classes. Their responses showed that they understood the role of participation and how it can positively impact their learning and mastery of the course material. Research has showed that behavioral engagement can “vary in intensity and duration; it can be short term or situation specific, or long term and stable” (Fredricks et al, 2004, p. 61). The student-athletes in our study suggested that they show behavioral engagement by listening attentively, writing notes instead of typing in on a computer to avoid any distractions and studying outside of class. However, one student-athlete mentioned that their grade is a representation of their engagement in class, which correlates with which the research on achievement viewpoint shared by Fredricks et al (2004). Fredericks et al (2004) stated engagement is linked to improved academic achievement and commitment to school.

One student-athlete provided a contrasting view centered around showing disinterest and unwillingness of attending classes. They went on further to express their view of the professor teaching the course material that was illogical to them and thought that it was pointless. This opinion was only shared by this student-athlete as they had a unique a perspective about the concept of school but still thought school was important for their future. Further examination revealed that this is a male student-athlete who participates in a non-revenue sport (Track and Field), is a senior and identifies as Black/African American. This opinion was unlike other student-athletes with a similar

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background but who have a different approach to the concept of school. Considering that this individual is of a minority group and participates in a non-revenue sport, the researcher would have expected a different viewpoint.

The student-athlete body has been known to be a privileged group on college campuses because they have access to an extensive range of resources provided by the athletic department (Simon et al., 1999). They have early course registration to help with the facilitation of practice blocks, have access to tutors, learning specialists, mentorship meetings and weekly meetings with their academic advisors (Simons et al., 1999). All these resources provided by the athletic department in addition to those academic resources that are available to the regular student body are at their disposal. Perhaps, access to these resources is perceived by this student as intrusive to their autonomy as a young adult (Smetana, Robinson, & Rote, 2015).

Emotional engagement entails the individual's approach to their instructor, peers, mentor, or academic counselor. It also involves their perception about the university. Overall, the findings show that the student-athletes are emotionally engaged in the classroom. They spoke positively about their interactions with their professors and sought help if they did not understand the class material or scored badly on an exam; this finding was consistent with Gayles' (2015) description that "interacting with faculty, participation in student groups and organization, reading, writing and studying for class, attending class and other circular activities are forms of engagement" (p. 210). Their willingness to seek help, showed their interest and commitment to their academics (Meyer., 1990).

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However, the student-athlete who was previously discussed in the behavioral engagement section also had opposing views. As previously mentioned, emotional engagement entails any negative or positive reaction towards their teachers, peers, and academics. Therefore, this student-athlete at first stated that he did not think his teachers cared about him, then quickly retracted his statement. Then he shared about having mixed feelings; and later shared that he thought some cared, while others did not. Perhaps these experiences with professors at Southeastern University preceded the behavioral engagement issues expressed by this student.

Research Question 3: What are the roles of coaches and peers in student-athlete development and school engagement?

Student-athlete friendships are an important aspect of the student-athlete identity and academic engagement. Crosnoe et al., (2003) stated that forming friendships with their peers is an important advantage because it helps youth to learn tasks in their categories. Furthermore, as the student-athletes grow and develop within their social groups, they begin to understand their own identities (Crosnoe et al., 2003). As a result, three sub-themes were developed as a derivative of this overarching theme. These sub-themes were teammate friends, classmate friends and peer influence. The first sub-theme; teammate friends seemed to be an important aspect of student-athlete peers. An important point raised by a student-athlete is the familiarity with the academic and athletic schedules. Being that student-athletes have similar academic and athletic schedules, it was important for them to form a bond with other student-athletes who have the same experience. Furthermore, being that student-athletes used the same academic and athletic

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resources, they unknowingly spend an immense amount of time together. Therefore, Crosnoe et al., (2003) state that friendships are not developed by chance, but they are directed by the many occasions in which people meet. As a result, student-athletes regarded their teammates as some of their best-friends.

However, one student-athlete shared a different point of view and mentioned that she enjoyed not being around student-athletes because she wanted to engage in non-athletic discussions. This opinion could be attributed to the athletic and personal challenges that she had faced throughout her collegiate years. In that same vein, Crosnoe and colleagues (2003) disclosed in his article that from the interpretive point of view, that friendships change overtime and their behaviors and habits define their social groups. Thus, the changed mindset portrayed by the student-athlete, could be attributed to their association with a different social group.

The second sub-theme explored how intertwined the student-athletes were with the relationships formed with their classmates. Crosnoe and colleagues (2003) suggested that the creation of friendships is primarily determined where young people reside and go to school. Thus, since students-athletes spend a vast amount of time together, they are more likely to form bonds and relationships with each other. In turn, they would spend the least amount of time with their classmates outside the class due to their athletic obligations and scheduling. Student-athletes made mention of scheduling conflicts, saying that collaborating on group projects were the only times they interacted with their classmates outside of class time, otherwise little to no contact was made.

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The third sub-theme covered peer influences and how those interactions aided the student-athlete in their personal development. The peer influences that the student-athletes made mention of were those of their fellow student-athlete peers who shared unique experiences as them. Crosnoe et al., (2003) explained that having academically oriented friendships may be more relevant to the academic outcomes of the student-athletes even if the likelihood is low. Therefore, our findings found that peer influence played an important role in the lives of the student-athletes; their peers helped motivated them academically, instilled important values such as loyalty and challenged them as an individual.

The Bronfenbrenner Ecological System is based on the idea that systems interact together, and that those interactions define the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Although this research focused on the microsystem (i.e. peers and coaches), the researcher also acknowledges the influences that interactions between these microsystems within the mesosystem could have on the student-athletes. Therefore, those interactions between coaches and faculty, or academic advisors and coaches, could also impact the academic engagement of the student-athlete. For example, if the academic advisor and coaches have contrasting views on academic and athletic expectations, this contrast can result in negative outcomes for the student-athlete as they must balance the desires of both parties. Therefore, it is imperative that those individuals who interact within the mesosystem system have similar goals and are engaged in positive interactions for the betterment of the student-athlete.

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Coaches play an integral role in the lives of their student-athletes. Not only do athletic coaches develop the athletic abilities of their student-athletes but they can also reinforce academic messages as well (Alder & Alder., 1985). Therefore, coaches can also offer their student-athletes' positive academic messages which correlated with our findings from the study as well. Our findings show that coaches were very instrumental in the student-athlete's academic journey by personally inquiring about their progress and offering words of encouragement. Research has shown that even though coaches are hired to achieve success in the athletic field, they can also have an impact on their student's academic achievement. The research further explains that with the respect and relationship student-athletes have with their coaches, they are more likely to get this group's full attention and promote their development over a variety of domains whether personal or academic (Harris et al., 2014).

In addition to the academic encouragement that coaches could provide, they can also offer athletic/professional encouragement to their student-athletes. Although there was limited literature on the professional encouragement given to student-athletes by their coaches, impacts could be attributed to the "student-athlete" reinforcing messages that have permeated the intercollegiate scene, hinting to the fact that players are students first, and athletes second. However, researchers Beamon & Bell (2002) investigated the high expectations of African American and White student-athletes on pursuing a professional career. Student-athletes in both non-revenue and revenue sports today still aspire to "go pro" and have received encouragement from their athletic coaches in pursuing such career paths. This was evident in our findings as the students expressed

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their desire of becoming professionals in their respective sports and have received encouragement from their athletic coaches. Although the student-athletes expressed their professional desires, they still aspired to complete their undergraduate degree which showed that they acknowledged the fact that athletics will not last forever, thereby planning for their futures. Furthermore, even though the student-athletes expressed their professional desires, they did not talk about obtaining a fast pace to “economic success” as with the student-athletes in the Beamon and Bell’s (2002, p. 189) study.

Even though this study did not seek to investigate parental support, it emerged as one of the primary influences in the student-athlete’s lives and was a recurring code that the student-athletes highlighted during the semi-structured interviews. The prevalence of this emerging sub-theme highlights the significance of parental influence in student-athlete lives and the role they play in instilling and valuing the importance of education. Our findings show that these educational values were instilled from as early as their childhood years and led participants to feel obligated to perform at their best in their academics. In some of their households, academics seemed to take precedence over any athletic obligation or extra-circular activities which spoke volume. Furthermore, Dennis, Phinney & Chuateco (2005) stated that parents can instill the academic expectations in their children by providing encouragement and emotional support.

Limitations

Several limitations mark this study. Even though the study aims to get the diverse perspective student-athletes from various sporting disciplines, athletic abilities, and academic ambitions, only highly engaged student-athletes were interested in

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participating. Furthermore, since the sample primarily consisted of student-athletes who are apart of non-revenue sports, it can be safely assumed that they were not receiving a significant amount of athletic scholarship. As a result, they may feel more obligated to excel academically to show appreciation to their parents. Additionally, due to this unique sample of engaged student-athletes, this study may not be generalizable to other Division I schools and student-athletes across the nation. Also, every student-athlete's collegiate/athletic experience is unique to them; therefore the researcher most likely captured only a small portion of it. Lastly, the responses were based on the student-athlete's unique experience; therefore, a self-report of their involvement may have been exaggerated for fear of embarrassment. Future research should consider including multiple perspectives of student-athlete engagement (e.g., coaches, faculty, parents) and multiple methods to assess these constructs (e.g., questionnaires, observations). Furthermore, because this research only addressed the student-athlete's identity in predicting their academic engagement in the classroom, future studies could address student-athlete's aspirations to pursue athletics professionally and how it could potentially affect their identity and the major they pursue upon enrollment in a university. The study was also cross-sectional with a small sample. A future study could be done on a larger scale, where a longitudinal study could be carried out with student-athletes over the duration of their collegiate careers to better understand how these constructs may affect the trajectories of student-athletes' well-being and success. Lastly, a similar study could be conducted using the methods and interview protocol but only include revenue sports to see if the findings were consistent across different student-athlete populations.

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Implications

Numerous implications can be offered as a result of the findings of this study. Upon the completion of this study, new information will be added to the existing literature on student-athlete identity. It is hoped that the findings of this study will be used to improve student-athlete programming and used to change the negative culture about student-athletes.

Firstly, since student-athletes mentioned that they wanted to be remembered for their non-athletic deeds, the student-athlete development department could provide more opportunities for student-athletes to connect with various elementary schools or local nonprofit organizations within the community, thereby extending their reach. Their role could be in the form of a mentorship/ friendship aspect that promotes the likelihood that the children will have a positive self-image and form healthy relationship with the student-athletes. Furthermore, the athletic department could start a new initiative that encourages apparel sponsors to develop and provide business casual clothing to student-athletes. Student-athletes could then have additional options to express their identities beyond the stereotypical athletic clothing provided by apparel companies. .

Secondly, one theme that emerged from the interviews was the importance of parental support in the academic lives of the student-athletes. Dennis et al. (2005) indicated that one of the most frequent and important proximal interactions for young adults is face-to-face contact with, and encouragement from family members that will play a significant role in academic outcomes. Therefore, having this type of support can boost academic confidence as well as their self-esteem. Therefore, implementing a

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parents and caregivers of student-athletes seminar during the summer, upon the student-athletes' return to campus might be beneficial. This session would be offered annually, where parents and caregivers would be educated on the importance of their support both academically and athletically in the lives of their child(ren) in college.

Thirdly, academic engagement is a vital component of learning and progressing towards a degree. Since a substantial number of student-athletes responded favorably to the engagement questions, it is evident that they are appreciative of the academic lessons. However, to include other student-athletes who may have low engagement levels, student-athlete programming could urge those student-athletes to be more engaged with their professors by encouraging them to visit their office hours and seek help if needed. Also, the researcher acknowledges that students learn differently; therefore, student-athlete support staff could provide workshops for faculty that provide guiding principles for working with student-athletes and encourage the professors to use diverse teaching methods to improve rates of engagement. In that same vein, staff could encourage professors to devote time to form personal bonds with the student-athletes, thereby engaging in enriching conversation outside the realm of their athletic identity (Fredricks et al. 2004).

Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed several processes within the student-athlete experience and their interactions with peers and coaches. This research has added to the body of knowledge on student-athletes in three ways: 1) student-athletes desired to be viewed as well-rounded individuals; this not only entails their exploits in athletics but in

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the community as well; 2) student-athletes understand and value the importance of education, and are therefore engaged in class; and 3) student-athletes consider their teammates as some of their best-friends.

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Appendices

Appendix A

List of Sports	Number of Desired Participants	Number of Actual Participants
Men's Track and Field	2	2
Women's Track and Field	2	2
Men's Cross Country	2	1
Women's Cross Country	2	2
Women's Soccer	2	2
Men's Soccer	2	1
Women's Basketball	2	1
Men's Basketball	2	0
Men's Golf	2	0
Women's Golf	2	1
Softball	2	1
Women's Tennis	2	0
Men's Tennis	2	2

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Baseball	2	0
Women's Rowing	2	2
Volleyball	2	2

Total Number of Desired Participants: 32

Actual Total Number of Participants: 19

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Appendix B

Research Questions Index

RQ 1	RQ 2	RQ 3
CIQ1	AIQ2a	IQ 1
CIQ2	AIQ2b	FWQ 1
PIQ2a	SAIQ1	AIQ4
	SAIQ3	AIQ5
	BEQ2	

Key:

RQ- Research Question

CIQ- Coaches Influence Question

PIQ- Peer Influence Question

FWQ- Final Wrap-Up Question

AIQ- Athlete Identity Question

SAIQ- Student-Athlete Identity Question

BEQ- Behavioral Engagement Question

IQ- Identity Question

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Appendix C

Brief Demographic Survey

1) How old are you?

2) What religion do you consider yourself?

3) What is your gender?

Male Female. Other

4) What sport do you play?

5) How would you identify your race/ethnicity (check one)?

Asian, or Asian American, including Chinese, Japanese, and others

Asian Indian, (Asian) Indian American

Black or African American

Latino/a

Middle Eastern/North African American

Native-American/Alaska Native

Pacific Islander

White, Caucasian, Anglo, European American

Two or more races: (Please specify: _____)

Other: (Please specify: _____)

6) Are you Hispanic (check one)?

Yes ___ No ___

7) What is your class standing?

Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior Graduate

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Appendix D

Interview Protocol

General Questions

1. What is your major? Why did you pick that as a major?
2. Have you switched majors since arriving?
3. What year are you in the degree program?
4. What is your official sport/ team you play for at Southeastern?
5. Why did you choose Southeastern?
 - a. Identity Questions
6. Pretend I know nothing about you, what are three words you would use to describe yourself to me?
 - a. Why did you select _____? (for each word)
7. How do you want to be remembered for your time in college?
 - a. What do you think will be the most memorable to you about your time here at Southeastern?
8. Describe how you got started playing your sport.
 - a. How long have you played the sport?
 - b. Student Identity Questions
9. Broadly, how are you performing in your classes? Do you feel like you are excelling, just doing okay, or concerned about your overall performance?
 - a. Tell me more about that.
10. How important is it to you that you do well your classes?

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- a. Why is that?
 - b. Tell me about a time when you did well in class? /proudest moment in your classes?
11. How would you react if you did poorly on an exam?
- a. Tell me about a time when you did poorly in class?
 - b. Athlete Identity Questions
12. What do you typically wear to class? (Follow- up and see if they would identify it as athletic (ex. Yoga pants) or team-based clothing (Southeastern attire).
13. Why/ Why not?
14. How do you feel if you performed poorly in a game/match/meet?
15. Does it influence your overall attitude/ affect outside you of practice and games?
16. Do those feelings stick with you into the classroom?
17. Why would you feel that way?
18. What would you do if you were not able to play your sport anymore? (Ex. Injury, or ineligible to play)
19. Would you still want to be involved but in another capacity? Why/ Why not?
20. How has being involved in your Southeastern sport/ athletic team changed who you are as a person?
21. How do you think that the athletic role has enhanced other roles in your life?
- (Snyder, 1985, p.215)

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- a. Has it given you skills? Competencies? Social Network? Friendships?
Career contacts?
 - b. Tell me more about those experiences...
 - c. Student-Athlete Identity
22. Give me a time where you felt like your student identity took precedence over, or was more important than, your athletic identity?
 - a. We know that athletics is like a full-time job. When does being a student come before this?
 - b. Is there a time in the semester when you are more concerned with academic than athletics?
23. Do you decrease your academic load “in-season” so that you can focus more on athletics? (Snyder, 1985, p.212). Do people encourage you to do that? Is that a lesson learned from experience?
24. Did participating in athletics influence your current major/ minor? Why is that?
25. Since you arrived at Southeastern, have you expressed a greater interest in academics rather than athletics? (Miller & Kerr, 2002).
 - a. Tell me more about that?
26. Have you found a career that you are passionate about or a field that interests you?
 - a. Peer Influence Questions
27. Who are your friends? Where did you meet them? Are you able to spend time with them?

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28. Tell me more?
29. How have your friends influenced who you are as a person?
30. Do you think your friends care about school and doing well in class?
 - a. Why do you think that?
31. Do you hang out with your classmates outside of the classroom?
 - a. Why or Why not?
 - b. Coach Influence Questions
32. What role does your coach play in your academic life?
33. Does your coach set high standards in and outside the classroom in terms of performance? If so, in what ways?
34. Does your coach have any influence on the types of courses you take? (Alder& Alder, 1985)
35. Formal: you cannot take classes after 3pm on these days of the week. Informal: unwritten rules
 - a. Why do think/ say that?
36. Do you feel like your coach sees your long-term potential as an athlete?
 - a. Why do you say/ think that?
 - b. Academic Engagement Questions
 - c. Behavioral Engagement (*Finn, 1993, p. 5*)
37. Do you come prepared for your classes?
 - a. Bring your pens/ notebooks/ textbooks/ computer to class?
38. Generally, do you typically complete assignments/ projects on time?

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39. On a scale of 0 to 10 (0 being the lowest and 10 being the highest) how engaged are you in your classes and degree program?
- What are some of the ways you show that you are engaged in class?
 - Tell me about a time when you were engaged in class? Positives?
 - Emotional Engagement (*Fredricks et al, 2004, p. 60*)
40. How would you describe your interactions with your professor and classmates?
- Do you attend office hours? Talk to them? Spend any time getting to know your professors? What about classmates?
 - How do non-athletes in your classes, treat you when they discover you are an athlete? (Meyer, 1990)
41. Do you think your teachers care about you?
- Why do you say that?
42. Are you excited about learning/ being in class?
43. Tell me more.
- Cognitive Engagement (*Fredricks et al, 2004, p. 60*)
44. Do you feel like school is important to your success? How so?
- Are the things you learn in your classes useful?
 - Why do you think that?
 -
 - FINAL WRAP UP QUESTIONS
 - Which identity best describes you, a Student (primarily concerned with your academic success, and just happens to play a sport), an Athlete

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(primarily concerned with your athletic performance, and just have to take classes to remain eligible) or a Student-athlete (someone who has found a balance between both being a student and an athlete at Southeastern)?

45. Why would you say that?

46. Why is that identity significant to you?

- a. What are you planning to do after you graduate?
- b. What is the highest degree you intend to obtain? Explain more.