

INFLUENCES IN THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF FEMALE STUDENT-ATHLETES  
PURSUING A CAREER IN COLLEGIATE ATHLETICS

By

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To all the women of the University Athletic Association, for their daily perseverance as role models for the next generation of women in collegiate athletics

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Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School  
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Since the passage of Title IX, collegiate athletics has experienced a sizable increase in female student-athlete participation and a disproportionate low number of females entering leadership positions in coaching and administration. Past research has documented the possible barriers preventing females from entering the field and negative factors leading to exit. The significance of this research was to provide new data on the positive factors of influence which may lead to entry. The purpose of this study was to explore factors of influence leading current female student-athletes to pursue future careers in collegiate athletics. An online request for participation was distributed to (N=262) current female student-athletes at the University of Florida. There were a total of (N=45) initial responses and (N=12) participants in this study. Qualitative data was gathered using open-ended questions in video-recorded focus group sessions. Five common themes emerged from the responses of the participants; experiences in sport, familiarity, social networks, role models, and delay of entry into the field. Conclusions of this study were derived within the key concepts of the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) – self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals – for in-depth analysis of the career development of the participants. Recommendations stemming from the results of this study include introducing career development programs designed for student-athletes at the

institutional level, focusing on building student-athletes social networks within collegiate athletics, and promoting the current initiatives sponsored by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). Future research is warranted using an older sample of participants already established in entry level positions (i.e. graduate assistantships and internships) in collegiate athletics.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

### **Employment Trends of Women in the NCAA**

Prior to the implementation of Title IX, 90% of all women's sports were coached by females. In 2006, there was a historic low of 42.4% of female coaches leading women's collegiate sports teams. The total number of female head coaches of intercollegiate athletics teams is currently 20.6% (Acosta & Carpenter, 2008). This underrepresentation of female head coaches in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has prompted researchers to investigate potential causes (Demers, 2004; Drago, Hennighausen, Rogers, Vescio, & Stauffer, 2005; Lough, 2001; Lovett & Lowry, 1994). The decrease in female coaches is of particular interest because the participation of females in collegiate athletics has increased exponentially with the implementation of Title IX. Since 1970, the average number of women's athletics teams per institution has increased from 2.5 to 8.65 for a total of 9,101 women's collegiate teams. In 1968, there were an estimated 16,000 female college athletes compared to over 180,000 female college athletes in 2008 (Acosta & Carpenter, 2008).

Researchers have suggested that those entering collegiate athletics, especially coaching, should be representative of the student-athletes who participate in the sport (Everhart & Chelladurai, 1998; Sagas, Cunningham & Teed, 2006). However, at this time of increasing female participation, there is a contrasting decrease in the proportion of females entering the field professionally (Acosta & Carpenter, 2008). Females are well represented as student-athletes, but not as coaches or administrators in leadership positions within the NCAA (Acosta & Carpenter, 2008; Lough; 2001; Rhode & Walker, 2008). Before measures can be taken to work toward gender equity, research must explore factors influencing successful entry into the field by female student-athletes. A participant in Rhode and Walker's study (2008) perhaps confronted

the issue most accurately: “There is plenty of focus on development of female players but not much in terms of developing female coaches. [Female athletes and young assistant coaches] are not seeing enough encouragement to continue” (p. 18).

### **Statement of Purpose**

This study intended to explore why female student-athletes initially pursue a career in athletics. A large portion of research has focused on the barriers preventing females from entering the field and even challenges keeping females from advancing in their career (NCAA Study 1989, 2007; Acosta & Carpenter, 1988; Drago, et al., 2005; Everhart & Chelladurai, 1998; Pastore, Inglis & Danylchuk, 1996; Sagas & Cunningham, 2004). However, few studies attempt to identify common factors of influence leading females to enter the field. Accordingly, researchers have documented that the majority of women assuming leadership positions – Senior Woman Administrators (SWA) and Division I or II athletic directors – began their careers as coaches. Also, of the identified female leaders in athletics, most were former high school and collegiate student-athletes (Teel, 2005). Thus, there is a need to sample female student-athletes, the ideal population to recruit for careers in collegiate athletics. The NCAA has examined the female student-athlete population with regard to their career interests. Yet, this study offers mostly quantitative data as results are limited to survey responses (NCAA Study 1989; 2007). There is still a need to examine the career pathways of female student-athletes as it relates to their personal, social, and environmental influences. By employing qualitative methods, such as a focus group, this study partly fulfills this need for more in-depth qualitative information about the decision-making process of the subjects pursuing a career in athletics. Once common factors of influence are identified, practitioners may have a better understanding of how to encourage and develop initial career pursuits of female student-athletes, which may translate into promotion to leadership positions.

Dena Evans, former Stanford cross country head coach who led her 2003 team to a national championship, perhaps best explains the experience of being a female student-athlete who later pursued a career in coaching:

I remain convinced that among the hundreds of student-athletes I have met over the course of my journey in coaching, many would be brilliant coaches, daily mentors, teachers, of sport and life...Who among them will end up not making a difference in her sphere of influence because no one thought to give her the keys of access? Which student-athletes will miss out on a fantastic coach because that potential coach never thought of the profession as an appealing career direction? (2007)

This study sought to identify those “keys of access” or the influences that current female student-athletes identify as instrumental in their decisions’ to pursue careers in collegiate athletics. The following research questions served as a guide for conducting this study:

1. What are common factors of influence in female student-athletes’ decision to pursue careers in collegiate athletics?
2. What formative experiences influence the projected career paths of current female student-athletes pursuing collegiate athletics?
3. What are the implications for collegiate athletics to encourage current female student-athletes to pursue careers in the field?

### **Conceptual Framework**

Responses of the focus group were interpreted through the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT). As Merriam (2001) states, “a central characteristic of qualitative research is that individuals construct reality in interaction with their social worlds” (p. 37). Thus, SCCT considers personal, social, and environmental factors of influence emphasizing self-efficacy, outcome expectations, perceived consequences of behavior, coping mechanisms to overcome barriers, and the ability to set goals (Fitzgerald, Fassinger, & Betz, 1995; Hackett & Byars, 1996; Lent & Brown, 1996; Stitt-Gohdes, 1997).

Traditional theories of career development (Holland, 1959; Parsons, 1909; Super, 1957) do not directly address career decisions of females, as these theories primarily relate to males.

Further, these theories may not relate to the athletic population of this study. The SCCT provides a unique perspective for in-depth exploration of the career pathways of female student-athletes. This study framed the focus group questions within the key concepts of SCCT; self efficacy, outcome expectations, and establishing personal goals, to allow for later analysis within this frame (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1996).

### **Definitions**

1. Title IX: An educational amendment to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which stated no one, on the basis of sex, should be denied access to any educational program or activity that receives federal financial funds. This law has been extended to college athletics as many of these sponsoring institutions are federally funded.
2. National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA): A voluntary association with over 1,200 college and university members that organizes athletic programs
3. Homologous Reproduction: Kanter's (1977) theory that the dominant group in the work force will hire individuals with similar qualities to create a predictable working environment.
4. Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT): The theory of career development created by Brown and Lent that accounts for gender, race and ethnicity influences. There are three key concepts to SCCT: self efficacy, outcome expectations and personal goals.
  - a. Self efficacy – one's belief about his or her ability to succeed. Self efficacy is built through performance and accomplishment, physiological states, social persuasion, and vicarious learning
  - b. Outcome expectations – one's belief about the result of specific behaviors
  - c. Personal goals – the resolve to engage in a particular activity to affect an outcome
5. Interpretive Qualitative Research Design: Collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data by observing the acts of people or what they say. This type of research is subjective and refers to meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, and descriptions. The most common research designs for interpretive qualitative research include interviews and focus groups.
6. Traditional Single Category Design: A type of focus group method in which multiple sessions are held with a target population to gather data. The number of focus group sessions depends on when theoretical saturation is reached.
7. Theoretical saturation – the point at which no new information is discovered during a focus group

### **Delimitations**

- The subjects for this study were delimited to the University of Florida female student-athlete population.

### **Significance of Study**

This study proposed to gain insight into the career development process of those who are pursuing jobs within collegiate athletics. Such knowledge has practical implications, as the results of this study can be an educational opportunity for institutions and the NCAA to better understand how to recruit female student-athletes in collegiate coaching and administration. Recruitment of females into the field is an important issue, as research has illustrated increasing gender inequities (Acosta & Carpenter, 2008). At a time when female participation in collegiate athletics is increasing, there is a greater need for female representation in leadership positions. Furthermore, female student-athletes should be considered a primary source of candidates for future careers in collegiate athletics. This study also has potential implications for research, as it may lead to more longitudinal studies tracking career progression from current student-athletes to those with established careers in athletics. Although this proposed research can only give insight into the influences and processes in use at the University of Florida, it provides a starting point for comparisons and further research to be conducted.

## CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to gather qualitative and explorative data about why female student-athletes intend to pursue a career in collegiate athletics. Females are well represented as student-athletes in the NCAA but are underrepresented in coaching and administration. A multitude of data focuses on the barriers preventing females from entering the field and reasons why females leave the field (NCAA Study 1989, 2007; Acosta & Carpenter, 1988; Drago et al., 2005; Everhart & Chelladurai, 1998; Pastore et al., 1996; Sagas & Cunningham, 2004).

This chapter reviews key literature related to females employed in collegiate athletics and female student-athletes' career development in this field. The first section reviews continuing trends of females employed as coaches or athletic administrators in the NCAA. In the second section, potential barriers to females entering the field are explored. These barriers are categorized into three subgroups: homologous reproduction, gender discrimination stereotyping, and work commitment versus family commitment and imposed gender roles. Next, this study explores the characteristics of females who have successfully entered the field and maintained a career in NCAA athletics. The last two sections compile literature about career development theories, with the former focusing on general career development theories while the latter narrows its focus to the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT).

### **Impact of Title IX on Employment Practices in Intercollegiate Athletics**

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 established that all individuals, regardless of sex, have the right “to participate in educational programs or activities that receive federal financial assistance” (Whisenant, 2003, p. 179). Title IX, for the purpose of this research, required that both men and women have equal opportunity to participate in collegiate sports. Since the passing of such legislation, collegiate athletics has experienced a large increase in the

number of female participants (Acosta & Carpenter, 2008; Hart, Hasbrook, & Mathes, 1986; Hasbrook, 1988). Since 1970, the average number of women's athletics teams per institution has increased from 2.5 to 8.65, for a total of 9,101 women's athletics teams (Acosta & Carpenter, 2008). Bray (2002) found that the number of female student-athletes has increased from 24.2% in 1981 to 41.9% (as cited in Whisenant, 2003). However, the opportunities for employment of females in the field do not mirror the increase in participation opportunities for females (Rhode & Walker, 2008).

Prior to the implementation of Title IX, 90% of all women's sports were coached by females. Since the record low of 42.4% in 2006, the percentage of female coaches of women's teams has increased only slightly to 42.8%. The percentage of female head coaches of intercollegiate athletic teams has improved from 17.7% in 2006 to 20.6% in 2008. Yet, consistently over the years only 2-3% of all men's intercollegiate teams are under the direction of a female head coach (Acosta & Carpenter, 2008). Before the 1980s, women's athletics was governed by the Association for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women (AIAW), while men's athletics was governed by the NCAA (Pedersen & Whisenant, 2005). In the 1981-1982 academic year the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) held its first national championship for women and the AIAW folded soon after (Drago et al., 2005; Pedersen & Whisenant, 2005). After the integration of the AIAW into the NCAA, research shows a noted decline of women's leadership roles within women's athletics (Acosta & Carpenter, 2008; Pedersen & Whisenant, 2005); however, the involvement of the NCAA in this decline is complex (Drago et al., 2005).

The NCAA, as a governing body, has overseen intercollegiate athletics during the largest decline of women's teams coached by women (Acosta & Carpenter, 2008). Although the number of participation opportunities for females has increased to a record high of 9,101 women's teams,

the proportion of female coaches has not shown the same rate of growth, as research indicates that only 20.6% of all intercollegiate teams are coaches by females (Acosta & Carpenter, 2008). Similarly, prior to the merger with the NCAA, women held administration positions only for female athletics as structured by the AIAW (Pedersen & Whisenant, 2005). The merger resulted in a dramatic reduction of upper management positions available to females within collegiate athletics. For example, the most recent data indicates 21.3% of collegiate athletic departments operate under a female athletic director. However, this is misleading, as only 8.4% of Division I athletic directors are female. Furthermore, 11.6% of all intercollegiate athletics administrative structures have no women employed (Acosta & Carpenter, 2008).

The year 2008 marks the highest number of women employed in intercollegiate athletics, 14,742, in positions as athletic directors, assistant and associate athletic directors, head coaches, paid assistant coaches, head athletic trainers and head sports information directors. On the surface, this increase demonstrates progress toward gender equity in the field; however, roughly 42.8% of the 14,742 women employed are paid assistant coaches and only 1.5% are employed as athletics directors. These percentages demonstrate that the majority of women employed in intercollegiate athletics hold jobs in lower management positions. In fact, because nearly all women's athletic departments have merged with men's, less than one-fifth of top management positions are held by women (Acosta & Carpenter, 2008).

In response to the decrease in women employed in intercollegiate athletics, researchers have sought to identify a cause. Early research suggests that the underrepresentation of females was caused by women leaving the field and the vacant and new positions being filled by men (Hart et al., 1986; Hasbrook, 1988). More specifically, with the enforcement of Title IX and incorporation into the NCAA, women's athletics garnered greater financial support increasing

the attractiveness of coaching and administrative positions (Cunningham & Sagas, 2002; Rhode & Walker, 2008). At the same time, this restructuring led to the creation of full-time positions with greater demands of time and more responsibilities. In turn, there was an increase in male applicants and a decrease in female applicants for these positions within women's athletics (Cunningham & Sagas, 2002). As such, more males have entered women's intercollegiate athletics than females, as reflected in the work of Acosta and Carpenter's longitudinal study. Within the two year span from 1998 to 2000, 543 new jobs became available within intercollegiate athletics. Of those, 80% or 427 were filled by males (Cunningham & Sagas, 2002). Although this research cannot distinguish the number of female applicants, it does reflect that males are entering the field at a much faster rate than females. Furthermore, Wolverton (2006) identifies that men's teams have approximately one and a half times as many coaches as women's teams. With such a low percentage of females coaching men's teams, 2-3% as identified by Acosta and Carpenter, this may explain some of the gender inequity in collegiate athletics (2008).

### **Barriers to Entry**

Building upon the premise that males are more successful at entry into collegiate athletic careers, researchers have focused their studies on potential barriers to women. Barriers, as defined by Swanson and Woitke (1997), are "events or conditions whether within the person or in his environment, that make career progress difficult" (p. 443). Everhart and Chelladurai (1998) suggest that "the reasons for the underrepresentation of women in the coaching ranks do not reside in the women themselves" (p. 197). Specific reasons identified in research are as follows: perceptions of the success of the old boys' club (Acosta & Carpenter, 1988; Lovett & Lowry, 1994; Wicker, 2008), a lack of female applicants for coaching and administrative positions (Acosta & Carpenter, 1988), conflict with family obligations (Acosta & Carpenter,

1988; Drago et al., 2005), athletes' preferences for male coaches (NCAA Study 1989, 2007; Weinberg, Revels & Jackson, 1984), homologous reproduction by men (Lovett & Lowry, 1994; Sagas et al., 2006; Stangl & Kane 1991;), long work hours (NCAA Study 1989, 2007; Drago et al., 2005), and a lack of success experienced by women (Hart, et al., 1986).

Demers (2004) summarizes the barriers noted throughout literature as including “male control of the sport, the lack of role models for girls and women, the success enjoyed by old boys’ networks, the lack of time due to family responsibilities, stereotypes and preconceived ideas about women as coaches, employers’ reluctant to run the risk of hiring a female coach, and the lack of careful career planning by female coaches themselves” (Choosing coaching as a career section, ¶ 2). Of these multiple barriers, prominent groups emerge in which the aforementioned barriers can be categorized. In the Coaching and Gender Equity (CAGE) project, Drago et al. (2005) classified their findings of identified barriers into four groups: sex discrimination, extreme workloads, family-unfriendly jobs, and the fact that race and sexual orientation remain salient. Rhode and Walker (2008) attributed the underrepresentation of females to “unconscious biases, exclusionary recruiting networks, and inflexible working structures” (p. 8). For purposes of this literature review the aforementioned barriers to entering collegiate athletics have been narrowed into three categories: (a) homologous reproduction, (b) gender discrimination and stereotyping (c) work commitment versus family commitment and gender roles.

### **Homologous Reproduction**

Research has documented a connection between the gender of athletic administrators responsible for hiring and the gender of those hired (Acosta & Carpenter, 2008). Some researchers have identified this strength of a “good old boys” club and weakness of a “good old girls” club as a perceived cause for both women leaving the coaching field and the increase in

males entering the field (Acosta & Carpenter, 2008; Lovett & Lowry, 1994; Rhode & Walker, 2008; Wicker, 2008). Researchers Lovett and Lowry (1994) studied the administrative structure of 1,106 public secondary schools in Texas, testing Kanter's theory of homologous reproduction in building and sustaining a "good old boys" club in athletics. Kanter (1977) explains that the dominant group will systematically hire individuals of the same qualities in order to create predictable working environments (as cited in Lovett & Lowry, 1994; Sagas et al., 2006). Thus, the practice of homologous reproduction can "become a structural barrier that prevents the advancement of women in many occupations...when men are over-represented" (Sagas et al., 2006). In their study, Lovett and Lowry (1994) found that "the opportunity for homologous reproduction on the part of males is much more prevalent than for females" (p. 32). Participants in Rhode and Walker's study also expressed the control of a "good old boys" club in a written survey, through open-ended questions (2008). These participants emphasized that there are too few women in leadership positions to build a strong network among females in the profession.

These findings, supporting the effectiveness of the "good old boys" or the "good old girls" club, are concurrent with the statistical data of Acosta and Carpenter's longitudinal study. Their study has documented that the percentage of total female coaches hired is lower when the athletic administration is composed only of males. In fact, in 2008, an average 30.6% of the coaching staff was comprised of female coaches at Division I NCAA institutions with a male athletic director and an all male administration. This figure compares to 50.0% of the coaching staff comprised of females under a female athletic director (Acosta & Carpenter, 2008). This data marks a continuous trend, as a previous study by Stangl and Kane documented the same findings – significantly more women are hired under female athletic directors versus male (1991). Individuals in the field have speculated that women find difficulty in gaining positions of power,

such as athletic director, as men are fearful to lose the power in their networks (Rhode & Walker, 2008). Sagas et al. (2006) also investigated the influence of homologous reproduction at the collegiate coaching level. The researchers concluded that the gender of the head coach does impact the gender composition of the assistant coaching staff. In an examination of the coaching staff of four women's sports – basketball, soccer, softball and volleyball – the researchers found female head coaches “were much more likely to hire female assistants than male head coaches were to hire male assistant coaches” (p. 508). This finding contradicts that of Lovett and Lowry (1994) who argued the “good old boys” club to be stronger than that of the “good old girls” club. However, the researchers offered three explanations for these results: (1) the belief by male head coaches that they need a female assistant to “identify with their players”; (2) female head coaches, aware of the lack of females employed in intercollegiate athletics, make a conscious decision to hire female assistant coaches in an effort to improve gender equity; and (3) male coaches do not feel a “need to reproduce themselves” in their assistant coaching staff because of the likely benefit of having a male athletic director (p. 508).

### **Gender Discrimination and Stereotyping**

Everhart and Chelladurai (1998), in an effort to explain why gender inequity occurred in NCAA coaching positions, explored gender differences in attitudes toward coaching. The researchers found that females who had a female head coach expressed more desire to become a head coach themselves. Interestingly, the researchers also stated that females who had a male head coach perceived gender discrimination as a greater barrier to entering the field. As Fasting and Pfister (2000) expressed, “sport is a stage where masculinity is produced and demonstrated” (p. 92). In NCAA programs, Cunningham and Sagas (2002) found evidence of sex discrimination at the level of assistant coach in intercollegiate basketball programs. Their study showed that, of the current male and female assistant coaches on average females “had

significantly greater playing experience and received more honors as a result of their playing excellence than their male counterparts” (p. 492). Even with these greater qualifications women are the less represented gender in the field and express “less desire to become a head coach” (p. 493). Kane (2001) found similar results in that female coaches demonstrate greater experience, training and achievement than comparable male coaches. Rhode and Walker (2008), through their written survey of 462 collegiate coaches, found females to have better athletic resumes than their male counterparts. The same coaches responded that female coaches had to be “twice as hardworking” or “twice as successful” than males in the profession to garner the same level of respect and recognition. From these data it can be concluded that female coaches are held to higher standards in the hiring process and perceive that there are fewer gains to be made in their coaching career than male coaches.

This discrimination in the coaching field is best illustrated by benchmarks at the high school and professional level. In 2001, *Fuhr v. Hazel Park* sparked national attention in the U.S. federal courts as Geraldine Furh sued Hazel Park high school on the basis of sex discrimination in the hiring process of the boys’ varsity head coach. Furh, the varsity girls’ head coach of 10 years and varsity boys’ team assistant coach of 9 years, was passed over for the job, which was given to a less experienced male coach. The court’s ruling in favor of Fuhr strengthened Title VII of 1964, which prohibits hiring and firing on the basis of gender. At the professional level, Stephanie Ready became the first woman in history to coach a professional men’s sports team in the United States in 2002. But, her role was as an assistant coach under a head male coach (Wilson, 2002).

Strong coaching characteristics are more likely to be associated with masculine traits. For example, the CAGE project reported that student-athletes more often associated authoritarian

leadership characteristics with male coaches versus female coaches (Drago et al., 2005).

Researchers have also noted athletes' preference for male coaches (NCAA Study 1989, 2007; Frey, Czech, Kent & Johnson, 2006; Weinberg et al., 1984). The 1989 study executed by the NCAA documented that the female student-athletes surveyed based their preference for a male coach on gender stereotypes. The female student-athletes explained that "women hold grudges and tend to be petty and very moody," whereas "men seem to have better discipline of teams, and they also retain a better professional distance from the players". The results of the study by Weinberg et al. (1984) varied in that researchers found males to exhibit more negative attitudes to female coaches than their female counterparts.

In the 1989 NCAA study, 46.7% of female student-athletes surveyed answered that "stereotyping or misconceptions might be perceived as a barrier in attracting/retaining women in athletics careers" (p. 5). The Women's Sports Foundation addresses these stereotypes that perpetuate sex discrimination in sports. First, the ability of female coaches is often judged by their winning records. Few female coaches have won national championships, thus it is reasoned that males must be better suited for coaching. However, there are a greater number of male coaches and, following the laws of probability, it makes sense that a majority of national championships in all sports have been won under a male coach (Women's Sports Foundation, 2000). Further, research has shown females to be most underrepresented in sports that are recognized as the most competitive programs. This denies female coaches access to resources and the most talented athletes, thereby hindering their success (Rhode & Walker, 2008). Second, women are characterized as being less intense, not as demanding, and not strong enough for coaching when compared to men (Frey et al., 2006). This belief does not hold up, as attributing characteristics across a group does not accurately describe individuals. Third, it is commonly

thought that women (and men) take instruction and criticism better from men. This stereotype is embedded in the traditional gender roles of society as men are thought to be the dominant gender (Women Sports Foundation, 2000).

Interestingly, the CAGE report found that a significant proportion of female student-athletes “hold firm and often stereotypical views regarding coaching and gender” (Drago et al., 2005, p. 29). The majority of sampled female student-athletes responded that males are more capable of commanding respect, a positive trait in coaching associated with strong leadership skills. Similarly, those sampled associated authoritarian leadership with male coaches more often than with female coaches. Other characteristics female student-athletes identified as qualities of a successful coach included the ability to establish hierarchies, maintain professionalism, direct criticism or praise, and create a clear separation between coaching and personal life. These qualities of leadership are often associated with masculinity, and the researchers documented that the majority of female student-athletes stated a preference for a male coach above a female coach (Drago et al., 2005). Rhode and Walker (2008) documented similar findings from the coaches’ perspectives. Of the sampled collegiate coaches, 90% agreed that male athletes prefer male coaches and two-thirds disagreed that male athletes would be accepting of female coaches. When asked about the preferences of female athletes, two-thirds of the coaches believed that female athletes prefer female coaches. However, nearly all indicated that they believed female athletes would be accepting of a male coach.

Scott and Brown (2006) also established the existence of gender bias in assigning leadership based on preexisting stereotypes. Some athletes attribute this preference for male coaches to past experiences. The 1989 NCAA study found that, of the female athletes surveyed, those who expressed a preference for either a male or female coach often cited past experiences

with a particular sex shaped their preference. The study also concluded that a number of female athletes' preferences were based on gender stereotypes.

Evidence of what is perceived to be gendered coaching styles at the elite playing level has also been documented. Fasting and Pfister (2000), in a cross-national study of elite female soccer players, found that most of the athletes preferred a female coach. Although this result may seem promising for future status improvement of female coaches, the researchers stated: "results can be interpreted as mirroring the 'old fashioned' gender stereotypes where women are nurturing, emotional, while the men are aggressive and rough. But at the same time it mirrors the traditional gender order, where women are looked upon as the 'weaker' sex" (p. 104) For instance, the sampled athletes preferred the "female style of communication, which is described as understanding and caring" (p. 96). They also indicated that females are better psychologists than male coaches.

These beliefs uphold traditional gendered stereotypes, foster discrimination in the hiring process, and become a barrier to women seeking to obtain coaching positions. There are a few success stories in the forward progression of perceptions of female coaches. Dr. Marty Ewing of Michigan State University has sampled more than 30,000 youth athletes aged six to 18 years about coaching preferences. Her overall conclusion was that athletes were not particular about the gender of the coach but more concerned about the competency of the coach (Wilson, 2002). Advances have also been made in collegiate coaching. In 1998, San Jose State University hired Nancy Lewis as the men's and women's golf coach. Then freshman John Witherall vocalized the concerns that many of the players were having: "I didn't think it would work out with a female coach. I had never heard of a female coaching a men's team in golf" (Jacobson, 2001, p. 2). Yet, the male athletes adjusted according to Chuck Bell, the Director of Athletics, who witnessed

male athletes respect Coach Lewis for her past accomplishments in the sport and her expertise in coaching. Within her first year as head coach, Lewis received the Western Athletic Conference Coach of the Year award (Wilson, 2002).

### **Work Commitment vs. Family Commitment and Imposed Gender Roles**

While homologous reproduction and hegemonic masculinity may contribute to hiring discrimination and the exclusion of women from entering the collegiate athletics field, research has also studied exclusion from the field due to the required level of commitment and imposed gender roles. In a study by Demers (2004), female athletes recognized the demanding nature of the job and its likely interference with a personal life as reasons for not entering the coaching field. Athletes acknowledged that they would be less hesitant to choose a coaching career if it allowed for a full personal and family life. A study conducted in 2007 by the NCAA found similar results. Of the 3,764 Division I female student-athletes surveyed, 60% responded that they were planning to pursue a career outside of athletics. Twelve percent indicated plans to pursue a career in intercollegiate athletics. Of this 12%, most indicated aspirations to coach. Participants were also asked to rank the importance of various reasons for not choosing a career in athletics. The top three reasons cited as being the most important in deciding to not pursue a career in athletics were the “desire for a higher salary,” “time requirements,” and “preference for a 9 to 5 job” (NCAA Study, 2007).

These sentiments have proven to be a continuous trend, as a previous study conducted by the NCAA in 1989 resulted in the same findings. Only 5.3% of 1,577 sampled female student-athletes expressed future plans to seek a position in intercollegiate athletics. Over 75% indicated “that a career offering higher average salary influenced their decision . . . to look outside the realm of intercollegiate athletics for employment” (p. 1). The second most cited reason (65.2%) for not pursuing a career in intercollegiate athletics was the appeal of a 9 to 5 job with nights and

weekends available for family or personal time. The female student-athletes who participated in the 1989 NCAA survey verbalized:

My father is a coach, and I grew up more or less without him, and without a lot of things!

I feel that it would be very difficult to start a family (which is hopefully part of my future plans) because of the time demanded as a coach, AD, etc.

I love athletics, but it takes too much time, and I wish to have a family and also a more office-type business job.

Research by Drago et al. (2005) concurs with the findings of the 1989 and 2007 NCAA Survey of Perceived Barriers. The authors noted that a majority of participants indicated that women must choose between a coaching career and having a family, and that a balance of the two, especially at the Division I level, is viewed as impossible. The same is true when sampling female coaches and athletic administrators. Those sampled did not view collegiate coaching as a viable career path because their “personal priorities” placed family ahead of career (Drago et al., 2005, p. 36).

The CAGE project found that the extreme workload and the family-unfriendly commitment to the job were the largest deterrent for females in the field. Coaches of both sexes have voiced concerns about their commitment to coaching leaving little or no time for their personal life, especially with regard to raising a family. On average, female coaches work 2400 hours per year and male coaches work 2600 hours, both above the national average (Rhode & Walker, 2008). This above average work load can result in a work-family conflict which Dixon and Bruening (2005) define as “a type of inter-role conflict wherein at least some work and family responsibilities are not compatible and have resultant effects on each domain” (p. 228). For example, Drago et al. (2005), in reference to data from the 2000 Census stated “men in coaching were just as likely as other men to be married, [but] women were far less likely (only

29.8%) than other full-time employed women (55.3%) to be married” (p. 5). These numbers seem even worse when examining how many women in the field of coaching are likely to raise children compared to other full time employed women; 17.8% versus 44.6%, respectively. In the study by Rhode and Walker (2008), over half of the sampled females identified themselves as single and only one quarter reported having children. These statistics were reversed for the males sampled, as one quarter indicated being single and one half reported having children. The same participants acknowledged the demanding schedules of athletic competition as a major deterrent for women with children.

Rhode and Walker (2008) explored current professionals’ perspectives on potential gender biases in college coaching. Some sampled cited a lack of interest by women as the true cause for gender inequity and not gender biases. Others cited the need to shift cultural attitudes and societal views of women’s roles in family structures. Respondents also elaborated that women had the added challenge of overcoming “the stereotypes and stigma [of being] a mother,” as motherhood is often perceived to be a negative influence on job competency and longevity in the field of athletics. For example, one participant, when asked how to lessen work/family conflicts for female coaches, stated “find coaches who don’t want children because when you get right down to it the mother is more likely to want to be home once she has children.” Thus, collegiate coaching can be discriminatory against women entering the field, as too often women must choose between a career in collegiate athletics and a family. Discouraged by the demanding and resultant discriminatory nature of coaching, women seek better pay options and more reasonable working hours in jobs outside of collegiate athletics.

### **Factors Influencing Job Attainment and Retention in Intercollegiate Athletics**

Although the majority of research has focused on influences that exclude women, a few have studied women who successfully enter a career in athletics. Pastore (1992) examined the

reasons males and females entered into coaching at two-year institutions. The findings indicated no difference between the two genders when entering coaching except the reason “to help female athletes reach their potential” (p 186). Female coaches rated this reason as the second most important, whereas their male counterparts rated it fourth. Danylchuk and Pastore (1996) examined the factors influencing job attainment in the coaching field. Their sample of athletic administrators and coaches of collegiate athletic programs responded that perceived networking with administrators of the same gender was an important factor in job attainment. This result suggests that those in the field believe a “good old boys” club or a “good old girls” club is influential in hiring decisions. In a similar study, Demers (2004) noted the subtle positive impact a female role model has on female student-athletes wanting to pursue a career in coaching. Participants responded that female coaches served as better role models than male coaches and this “seems to play a role in the recruitment of future female coaches” (Impact of having a female coach section, ¶ 2). Demers also stated the need for further research to understand how a greater number of female role models influence the female applicant pool for coaching positions (2004).

Pastore and Meacci (1994) studied factors of recruiting, selecting and retaining females in coaching positions, compared with those of males across four women’s sports – basketball, softball, tennis and volleyball. The study identified five employment factors – “Organizational Policies, Candidate’s Experience, Formal Recruiting, Informal Recruiting, and Candidate’s Credentials.” Interestingly, female coaches rated each of these five factors significantly higher in importance than male coaches. Both genders rated “Candidate’s Credentials” as the most important and the most used employment factor. Coaches rated “Organizational Policies” of greater importance than athletic administrators, indicating a need to place greater importance on

salaries and equitable program support to recruit female coaches. Consistently, “Formal Recruiting” was rated lowest in importance which suggests alternative methods of recruiting should be used when targeting female coaches (Pastore & Meacci, 1994). Similarly Rhode and Walker (2008) sampled current professionals to discover the factors of importance when recruiting females to a career in athletics. Respondents identified the need for “mentorship/professional development of prospective female coaches” and “institutional support of prospective female coaches” as the greatest areas needing improvement.

Pastore, Inglis and Danylchuk (1996) studied gender and power as they relate to developing strategies to retain females in the collegiate workforce. The researchers sought to establish a conceptual framework to identify variables related to the retention of coaches and athletic administrators. Their model included three constructs: “Work Balance and Conditions”, “Recognition and Collegial Support”, and “Inclusivity”. The first construct – “Work Balance and Conditions” – focuses on the demand of time, as well as conditions of the job (i.e. adequate support, sensitivity to family responsibilities, etc.). “Recognition and Collegial Support” refers to the status of the job and the public’s recognition of the position. Lastly, “Inclusivity” rates the workplace based on the presence of harassment, discrimination or gender equity. Therefore, the researchers sought to examine the importance of all three constructs for retaining coaches and athletic administrators.

Results were compared according to gender, job position and country. The sample included individuals from Canada and the Big Ten athletic conference. Notable in this study are the differences found across gender. Research revealed a significant difference for “Inclusivity,” as females rated it of greater importance than the males did. And, although not a significant finding, females rated “Inclusivity” as being less fulfilled than the males rated it. In fact, the

male participants found “Inclusivity” to be more fulfilled than its rating of importance. The findings as a whole indicated that “Work Balance and Conditions” was considered the most important to coaches and athletic administrators. Furthermore, this concept was found to be unfulfilled in the sample participants’ current positions. The “Recognition and Collegial Support” concept was also found to have higher ratings of importance when compared to the ratings of fulfillment. Thus, to improve the retention of coaches and athletic administrators, athletic institutions should improve factors related to “Work Balance and Conditions” and “Recognition and Collegial Support” (Pastore, et al., 1996).

Pastore (1993), in a study of NCAA Division I, II and III coaches of women’s basketball, softball, tennis and volleyball revealed no significant difference in overall job satisfaction between male and female coaches. However, the study did find that the type of sport coached did affect job satisfaction in relation to supervisory support (i.e. support from athletic administration). Coaches of women’s tennis rated the supervision facet of job satisfaction lower in comparison to coaches of the other sports. Therefore, Pastore’s findings suggest that the decline in number of female coaches is not caused by low job satisfaction when compared with males.

However, Pastore did find a significant difference between genders in citing potential reasons to leave the profession (1992). Females in the sample were significantly more likely to rate “administrative duties” and “intensity of recruitment” as reasons more than males would. Interestingly, the male coaches rated “decrease in time spent with the family and friends” higher than the female coaches as a potential reason for leaving the profession. However, this difference was not found to be significant. The male coaches were also more likely to rate “lack of financial incentive” higher than their female counterparts (p. 185). Although, again, this difference was

not found to be significant. It is important to note that Pastore's study only asked participants to speculate as to why they might potentially leave the field of coaching at a two-year institution. The author does note, as supported by Hart et al. (1986), that these potential reasons may differ from reasons cited for actual the withdrawal from coaching.

### **General Career Development Theories**

Classical theories of career development define career choice as a process influenced by personality, aptitudes and abilities. Early career development theory began with Parsons' argument that those more engaged in the career choice process have a higher degree of satisfaction with their careers (Brown & Brooks, 1996). In his 1909 book, *Choosing a Vocation*, he identified a framework of three factors that influence successful career development: (1) an understanding of one's own aptitudes, skills, and interests, (2) knowledge of the job requirements and the advantages and disadvantages, and (3) the ability to recognize how one's skills interplays with the job requirements (Fitzgerald et al., 1995).

By the 1950s, career development theory of Ginzberg, Ginsburg, Axelrad and Herma identified career choice as a process beginning in one's preteen years and concluding in young adulthood. In these years, an individual was recognized as developing through three stages – fantasy, tentative and realistic. In the last stage, realistic, an individual progressed through exploration (discovery of one's own likes, skills and abilities), crystallization (choosing a career path), and specification (taking steps to achieve the career choice made in crystallization). Throughout the career development process, this theory reasoned that individuals are influenced by a reality factor, educational processes, an emotional factor, and one's own values. This traditional career development theory cannot be applied to the proposed researched, as it does not allow for consideration of gender, race and social class in occupational choice (Stitt-Gohdes, 1997).

Shortly after, in 1953, Super combined Parsons' original theory with the work of Ginzberg and colleagues to identify the ten propositions of career development. His work emphasized two major tenets of career development: (1) career development as a lifelong process and (2) self-concept as an influence on behavior. He particularly emphasized that self-concept, which can further be divided into personal and social self-concept, is ever changing as a result of experience. These tenets supported his 1954 Theory of Vocational Choice which identified six stages – Crystallization, Specification, Implementation, Stabilization, Consolidation and Readiness for Retirement. Later, Super merged his idea of self-concept with his life span theory to accommodate for “heterogeneity and fluidity in adult career development,” (Niles & Herr, 2001, p. 15) by creating his Life Span Life Space Theory. Super identified five stages in which distinct career choices and development are made – Growth, Exploration, Establishment, Maintenance and Decline. He acknowledged that different people may fluctuate between different life spaces due to personal factors (needs, values, interests and aptitudes) and situational factors (family, community, culture, economic influences, and gender or racial biases). Super also maintained that progression through the stages is flexible (non-linear) and that individuals may repeat stages multiple times before moving on to the next (Niles & Herr, 2001).

To coincide with his theory, Super went on to develop a “Life Career Rainbow” which illustrated the interaction of life roles and life stages in a typical life span – from the role of “student” to “pensioner” (Fitzgerald et al., 1995). His theories also went as far as identifying the role of homemaker in defining women's participation in the labor force. Super (1957) described women's life and career patterns in the following categories: homemakers; conventional careers after college but before marriage; women who did not marry but worked throughout their life spans; women who held work and family roles simultaneously; women who returned to work

after having children; an unstable career pattern in and out of the workforce; or a multiple-trial career pattern. Super's early work has often been credited as being the first to document theory in the career development of women. Because of his theory, researchers have addressed the need for more flexibility within life roles and a stronger focus on contextual factors that influences these roles, especially culture. Many of his tenets of career development theory have been further developed by researchers, resulting in more applicable theories for present use (Fitzgerald et al., 1995).

In 1959, Holland identified six personality traits related to occupational environments – realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising and conventional. According to Holland's Career Typology, these different personality types revealed information about a person's career choice. For example, he believed that one's career developmental process is established through one's genetic predisposition and one's reactions to environmental demands. In simpler terms, Holland thought that individuals are attracted to certain careers that meet their personal needs and give them satisfaction. However, his work, is limited, as it is based on four assumptions. First, there are only six modal environments – realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional. Second, all people can be categorized into one of these environments. Holland's third assumption is that people will search for career environments that will aid them in using their skills and abilities, as well as allow for expressing their attitudes and values. The fourth assumption of Holland's theory is that behavior is determined by an interaction between personality and environment. Beyond these assumptions, strong gender bias can be found within Holland's Career Typology, which makes using such theory as a framework for this study not ideal. Specifically, females tend to score as artistic, social and conventional as their three strongest codes. Holland himself acknowledged that such results are a reflection of

society channeling females into traditionally female-dominated occupations (Holland, 1959).

Thus, since this research will focus on a nontraditional field for females, this study will not use Holland's Career Typology.

These aforementioned traditional career development theories cannot be applied to today's workforce (Brown & Brooks, 1996; Stitt-Gohdes, 1997) and therefore cannot be applied in this study. Furthermore, these theories cannot be applied to diverse populations, as critics have claimed such classical theories center around white, middle class men (Leong, 1995). Thus, such theories would be inappropriate for this study as this purposeful sample is constructed of young women. As stated by Stitt-Gohdes (1997), classical career development theories "reflect the dominant make-up of the professional work force 20-30 years ago: white, middle-class males. Indeed, women, people of color and the poor have been methodically omitted from career development research" (p. 13). Women's career development is different from that of men, as women's gender roles, especially those in a family structure, influence this process (Fitzgerald et al., 1995). As a woman's role varies, so does her career pattern. Hence, the traditional theories which identify career development as linear and predictable cannot be applied, as "the career pattern for women is more interrupted, nonlinear and unplanned" (Morrisey, 2003, p. 21). Therefore, researchers have recognized the need for theory that accommodates women's multiple and changing roles in society and identify all factors, positive and negative, which impact career development (Bierema, 1998; Lent & Brown 1996; Stitt-Gohdes, 1997).

### **Women's Career Development Theories**

The 1970s and 1980s brought a shift in career development theory by applying Bandura's Social Learning Theory. The shift also included a focus on women's career development.

Fitzgerald and colleagues captured this shift with a summary of the past 25 years of history in the study of women's career development (1995). Their summary began with the pre-theoretical

stage of women's career development, which focused on identifying factors of influence that led women to pursue careers outside of the home. Next, research and theory focused on motivational factors influencing women's career development. Such factors examined include education level, importance of family and specific personality traits. In the mid 1970s, theorists began identifying the barriers of women's career development including gender roles, discrimination, and financial resources.

By the 1980s, women's career development theory examined gender differences and was based on social learning and cognitive theories. Such theories included Gottfredson's theory of circumscription and compromise; Hackett and Betz's self efficacy theory; Astin's sociopsychological model; and Farmer's model of career motivation. In the early 1980s, Gottfredson's theory argued that career development began as early as the age of six with the gender socialization process. With gender socialization, individuals eliminate future careers based on imposed limitations from society, specifically gender roles and perceived prestige. For example, females learn to eliminate careers typically held by men, such as collegiate athletics. Acknowledging the influence of gender socialization is Gottfredson's greatest contribution to career development theory. However, his theory fails to include influences in adult career development such as family, career changes, and retirement (Fitzgerald et al., 1995; Wicker, 2008).

Hackett and Betz (1981) were the first to apply Bandura's concept of self-efficacy to the career development process of women. As Bandura established, self-efficacy or self-belief, is built from four sources: performance, vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, and physiological arousal. Self-efficacy also varied with environmental and contextual factors, interaction with people, and the difficulty of the task (Bandura, 1986). Hackett and Betz expanded on Bandura's

work by comparing the self-efficacy expectations of men and women in regard to careers traditionally held by men and those traditionally held by women. Results indicated that differences in self-efficacy between genders could be contributed to gender socialization (1981). Similar to Gottfredson's work, gender socialization and its consequential impact on self-efficacy led individuals to alter their career choice (Fitzgerald et al., 1996). Hackett and Betz's theory is limited, as it does not include the reasons that women exit and reenter the workforce, nor does it account for the barriers which exclude women from developing careers through advancement (Wicker, 2008).

Astin's sociopsychological model expanded on Bandura's Social Learning Theory by including personal characteristics and social influences. In particular, Astin "focused on the differential effects of socialization experiences that shaped women and men's career aspirations based on four major constructs: motivation, expectations, gender role socialization, and the structure of opportunity" (Wicker, 2008, p. 23). In short, career choices began with the socialization process and opportunities presented early in one's life. Specifically, Astin theorized that women pursued non-traditional career choices only when exposed to a variety of opportunities and having built confidence in their achievement (Fitzgerald et al., 1996). Use of Astin's sociopsychological model in further research has been limited, as the concepts are general in nature. In speaking of Astin's model, Fitzgerald et al, (1996) stated, "it has not proven heuristic, perhaps because the broad generality of its constructs do not lend themselves easily to operationalization" (p. 85).

Farmer, in her 1985 model, identified the strongest predictors of career aspirations to be personal characteristics, background factors, and environmental variables. Farmer's model also emphasized the dynamic process of behavioral, cognitive and environmental influences in career

choice. Specifically, Farmer mentions the importance of role models in non-traditional careers to increase career motivation. In her ten year longitudinal study, Farmer concluded career aspirations and achievement motivation are strongly related to environmental support for women (Wicker, 2008). These models of career development for women influenced the conception of the Social Cognitive Career Theory and further, its application to women.

### **Social Cognitive Career Theory**

The Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) originated with the work of Lent and colleagues (1996), which combined Bandura's concept of self-efficacy with Krumboltz and colleagues' social learning theory of career decision making. SCCT examines the processes that individuals develop when seeking a career (Wicker, 2008). This theory of career development argues that personal goal setting can shape one's behavior in conjunction with responses to environmental and personal influences (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1996). Accordingly, Lent and Brown (1996) stated, "this model holds that personal attributes, external environmental factors, and overt behavior each operate in interactive sets of variables and mutually influence one another" (p. 312). SCCT also takes into account the influence of perceived barriers during the career development process. In recent years, the SCCT has been widely used in career development research (Swanson & Gore, 2000).

The key constructs of SCCT are self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and establishing personal goals (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1996). As mentioned, self efficacy is built through the interaction of performance accomplishments, vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, and physiological arousal. These four sources of self-efficacy interact to create a self-belief that is specific to "people, behavior, environment, and contextual factors" (Wicker, 2008, p. 27). Outcome expectations are the believed result of a particular behavior. Expected positive outcomes serve as motivational factors whereas expected negative outcomes can deter an

individual from pursuing certain actions (Lent & Brown, 1996). Setting personal goals is the third core aspect of the SCCT theory. The practice of setting goals is influenced by self-efficacy and outcome expectations. As an individual builds self-efficacy in a particular area and has positive outcome expectations, he or she is more likely to set and achieve personal goals (Lent & Brown, 1996).

“The exploration of issues such as gender, external and internal factors, and barriers on career choice have also been an integral part of SCCT” (Wicker, 2008, p. 28). SCCT considers such influences, external and internal, as objective and perceived. The way in which objective influences are perceived may be of greater importance to an individual’s career development. These external or environmental influences are then related to the career decision making process through classification as either distal or proximal factors. Distal factors include role models; opportunities to gain experiences or skills in a particular field, academic profile, support systems, and gender-role socialization. Proximal factors are more closely associated with influences of the active career searching stage. Such factors include job opportunities, informal networks, financial position, and discriminatory hiring processes (Lent & Brown, 1996). By categorizing environmental influences into these two categories, distal and proximal, “SCCT addresses how perceived barriers affect careers and studies how women and other minority groups cope with these factors throughout their career paths” (Wicker, 2008, p. 30). In other words, individuals with greater coping efficacy can better manage perceived barriers.

### **Women’s Career Development and SCCT**

Greater focus on self efficacy, outcome expectations, personal goals and perceived barriers has been demonstrated in the amount of research that applies the SCCT to women’s career development. In those studies focusing on career self-efficacy, many have researched the importance and impact of role models (Scherer, Brodzinski, & Wiebe, 1991; Nauta, Epperson &

Kahn, 1998). Scherer et al. (1991) found that female students who observed successful role models have greater believe of their own potential success in same field. Research by Nauta et al. (1998) found higher levels of career aspirations of females in non-traditional fields with the presence of a role model. Gates further studied women's career decisions based on traditional versus nontraditional fields. Women in both fields identified their mothers as having a large influence in career choice. Those in non-traditional fields identified fewer female role models, were less likely to consider alternative career paths, and were more likely to identify their fathers as a role model (as cited in Wicker, 2008).

Other research using SCCT explores perceived barriers and the impact on the career decision process. Perceived barriers identified by researchers include family roles versus work commitment, limited role models, and discrimination and inequities based on gender (Leong, 1995; Wicker, 2008). Coleman sampled female administrators in education, business, and government to research perceptions of discrimination based on race and gender. Group barriers included "stereotyping, lack of social support, and exclusion from informal or formal networks" (as cited in Wicker, 2008, p. 34) Some of the organizational barriers identified were "exclusion from the old boys' network, and negative attitudes toward women in administration" (as cited in Wicker, 2008, p. 34). These are identical to many perceived barriers identified in research among professionals within collegiate athletics (NCAA Study 1989, 2007; Cunningham & Sagas, 2002; Drago et al., 2005; Lovett & Lowry, 1994; Scott & Brown, 2006; Weinberg et al., 1984).

SCCT takes into account the greater influence perceived barriers may have in career choices in comparison to skills and abilities. These barriers, which often reduce career self-efficacy, may include a lack of access to developmental opportunities, absence of role models, and even discrimination. "The application of SCCT to women's careers sustains the idea that the

career development process is complex and takes into account the interactive influences of behavior, environment, and cognition to explain career choice and behavior” (Wicker, 2008, p. 36).

### **Limitations of SCCT**

One limitation of SCCT is its relative youth as a theory in career development (Fitzgerald et al., 1995). More research is needed that applies SCCT to women and minorities, in order to understand the complexity of the variables which influence career development for these populations. Further, SCCT does not take into account all of the effects of gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic status associated with career choice. There is also a need for research that uses SCCT to explore the pathways of current female administrators, especially those administrators who participated in collegiate athletics (Wicker, 2008).

### **Student-Athlete Career Development**

Student-athletes, especially those at Division I institutions, have a less developed career path post graduation than their peers. Research has hypothesized that this lower level of career development is caused by time constraints, athletic identity, sport commitment, and not being fully integrated into campus (Martens & Lee, 1998). In general, Martens and Lee recommend implementing an intervention model with the student-athlete population to promote career development. Such program activities include awareness of institutional resources (i.e. career centers), the initiation of the self reflection of values and goals, education about possible internships and job opportunities and, finally, a focus on developing practical skills for employment. According to the researchers, taking such a holistic approach to career development for student-athletes is needed to overcome the limiting factors inherent in participating as an athlete (Martens & Lee, 1998). If their argument for using an intervention model is valid, then

participants in this proposed study should identify some of the suggested program activities as influencing factors in their path of career development.

The 2007 NCAA Study also offers insight of influencing factors in choosing collegiate athletics as a career. Female student-athletes who reported higher levels of agreement with the statement, “I would still compete if I had it to do over” were significantly more likely than female student-athletes with lower levels of agreement to report that their career will likely involve athletics or exercise science. Also, those athletes who reported their career will likely involve athletics or exercise science were more likely to report their roster spot as first team. Thus, there is some preliminary data correlating satisfaction with participation in collegiate athletics and the pursuit of a career in athletics or exercise science.

Nonetheless, more focused research must be conducted to specify other influencing factors. Personal stories come the closest to identifying those influences. Dena Evans, former NCAA cross country athlete, speaks of how she became Stanford’s head coach:

For me, access was the most obvious and valuable currency I enjoyed. I had access to some of the nation’s finest high school athletes in our recruiting pool, access to an assistantship in a storied program, and a virtuoso mentor in my head coach. After first convincing me to try coaching, he gave me sound athletic templates from which to learn, meaningful roles on the staff, and space to gain credibility with the athletes. He forced me to involve myself within the coaching community...I had an athletic director who wholeheartedly supported my promotion...and whose door had always been open to me since I was a student...I was not only given an entry level opportunity, but was groomed specifically for a position at the most prestigious level. (2007)

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to explore the process of female student-athletes’ decisions to pursue careers in collegiate athletics. Past research has focused on influences that discourage female student-athletes from pursuing these career tracks (NCAA Study 2007; Acosta & Carpenter, 1988; Lovett & Lowry, 1995; Rhode & Walker, 2008; Sagas et al., 2006; Stangl &

Kane, 1991). These studies and others have sampled current intercollegiate coaches and athletics administrators, documenting possible barriers that prevent females from entering the field. This study intended to build on such previous research by asking about the influences on female student-athletes to choose to pursue a career in intercollegiate athletics. The general goals of this study were: (1) to determine the influencing factors in female student-athletes' intentions to pursue careers in collegiate athletics and (2) to explore the process of female student-athletes' career choices in collegiate athletics. This research is unique in that the focus is on the positive influences. The research questions this study intended to answer were:

1. What are common factors of influence in female student-athletes' decision to pursue careers in collegiate athletics?
2. What formative experiences influence the projected career paths of current female student-athletes pursuing collegiate athletics?
3. What are the implications for collegiate athletics to encourage current female student-athletes to pursue careers in the field?

## CHAPTER 3 METHOD

The purpose of this study was to gather qualitative and explorative data about female student-athletes who intend to pursue a career in NCAA athletics. Research in this area is needed, as females are well represented as student-athletes in the NCAA but are underrepresented in coaching and administration. A multitude of data focuses on the barriers preventing females from entering the field and reasons why females leave the field (NCAA Study 1989, 2007; Acosta & Carpenter, 1988; Drago et al., 2005; Everhart & Chelladurai, 1998; Pastore et al., 1996; Sagas & Cunningham, 2004), but little research explores the positive reasons for entry. This chapter reviews the methodology used to gather data.

### **Focus Group Research Design**

This study used an interpretative, qualitative research design by conducting focus groups to gather data. As Krueger and Casey (2000) state, “focus group interviews should be considered when...the purpose is to uncover factors that influence opinions, behavior or motivation” (p. 24). In this study, a traditional single category design was used to target information rich individuals. This design is best, as this study collected data from a specific population and looked for commonalities. Thus, multiple focus group sessions of the same target population were conducted until no new information was divulged. At this point, saturation was reached (Krueger & Casey, 2000). As expected, three focus groups were held with a total of 12 participants to reach saturation (Morgan, 1997).

Individual interviews were considered for this study, as an interview method allows for greater control by the researcher and more information from each participant. However, a focus group method offered greater advantages in collecting data for this particular research. First, as stated by Krueger and Casey (2000), “the focus group presents a more natural environment than

that of an individual interview because participants are influencing and influenced by others – just as they are in life” (p. 11). Thus, one advantage is that the focus group allowed for observation of interaction on the topic. Also, the group environment allowed for direct evidence about similarities and differences in experiences. These relationships were more evident in the focus group method, rather than completing post hoc analyses of individual interviews. Lastly, because the researcher has less control of the dialogue during a focus group, more unexpected information is likely to be revealed than if individual interviews were completed. This “ability to give the group control over the direction of the interview is especially useful in exploratory research” (Morgan, 1997, p. 11). Thus, due to the exploratory nature of the study, a focus group method was chosen.

### **Limitations to the Focus Group Method**

There are limitations to using focus groups for this study. First, all data was collected through verbal behavior only. The researcher did not witness behaviors but rather analyzed the verbal responses of the participant. Second, group interaction may have influenced responses. Participants may have felt pressure to exaggerate how much career development and planning they have engaged in up to the point of this study. The group environment also has the potential to lead to a groupthink mentality, in which all participants agree with each other. Third, a group environment may have limited the responses of some, resulting in less depth from any one participant. Finally, the environment in which data is collected was managed and controlled by the researcher (Morgan, 1997).

### **Advantages to the Focus Group Method**

In spite of several limitations, the focus group method best suited the purpose of this study for several reasons. First, it enabled the researcher in-depth exploration in an area with little research. Second, a focus group was more beneficial for exposing complex data, such as the

dynamics of multiple influences. Third, the discussion produced in a focus group was better for exposing common trends among individuals with commonalities. Lastly, communication face-to-face had the advantage of gaining more information when compared to a survey method. Specifically, participants were asked to further explain or elaborate on responses given to provide more information (Krueger & Casey, 2000; Morgan 1997).

### **Participant Selection**

This study used a purposeful sample. Female student-athletes, who are intending to pursue a career in collegiate athletics, were selected from the University of Florida. Patton (2002) describes purposeful sampling as selecting “information rich cases to yield insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations” (p. 230). Such a sample has the potential to provide in-depth qualitative data about the influences guiding them in their career decision making process.

Based on data from the 2007 NCAA Study, 12% of the Division I female student-athlete population identified collegiate athletics as a possible career track. Applying this research to the estimated female student-athlete population at the University of Florida, approximately 31 individuals were hypothesized to be eligible to participate in this study. The participants for the focus groups were selected based on the following:

1. Is the respondent female?
2. Is the respondent enrolled at the University of Florida (UF)?
3. Is the respondent a current student-athlete?  
\* The definition of a current student-athlete includes those who may have exhausted eligibility but remained at the University of Florida to finish their degree in a ninth semester.
4. Does the respondent’s future career plans include working within collegiate athletics?

A list of all current female student-athletes enrolled at UF, along with their contact information, was available through the University Athletic Association. An initial email was sent as a request for participation, informing potential subjects of the nature of the study (see Appendix A). The

email asked potential participants to complete an initial questionnaire via an internet survey (see Appendix B).

Respondents who expressed intent to pursue a career in collegiate athletics, based upon four Likert scale statements, were selected for participation in a focus group. The Likert scale statements were as follows:

1. After graduation I plan to pursue a career in sports other than as a professional athlete.
2. After graduation I plan to pursue a career in collegiate athletics.
3. After graduation I plan to pursue a career outside of sports.
4. In 5 to 10 years I can see myself working in collegiate athletics.

Respondents were also asked for permission for further contact about participation in a focus group. Those who expressed any level of agreement with the second and fourth statements, and agreed to further participation in the study, were contacted via email through a Follow-Up Recruitment Letter (see Appendix C). Respondents who did not qualify for the study were thanked for their interest, but denied participation in the study. Those who gave no response after the initial email were sent a reminder e-mail one week after the original. After an additional one week, a follow-up e-mail was made to all potential participants as identified by their academic counselor who was aware of the student-athletes career interests.

Nineteen female student-athletes were selected to participate in a focus group. Respondents were then grouped together according to their level of agreement to the second and fourth Likert scale statements. Those respondents who indicated a higher level of agreement, “completely agree” or “mostly agree” were placed in one focus group, followed by moderate agreement, a mix of “mostly agree” and “slightly agree” in responses, and finally those who showed minimal agreement in responses, “slightly agree”. After initial placement to a group, respondents were given flexibility in scheduling to accommodate their schedules and as a result some adjustments were made in which individuals switched groups. The initial Request for

Participation (see Appendix A) explained that participation in the study was voluntary. A formal Letter of Consent was given to the participants at the focus group session to be signed (see Appendix D). Demographic information about the participants was collected at the conclusion of each focus group session (see Appendix F). A total of twelve of the nineteen eligible respondents participated in a focus group.

### **Procedures**

This study used a focus group format to collect qualitative data about female student-athletes' choice of pursuing a career in coaching or athletic administration in collegiate athletics. After selection, each participant was emailed the date, time and location of the focus group session, along with a request to confirm their participation. All focus group sessions were held on campus at the University of Florida. The time of each session was scheduled around the participants' class and practice schedules. Participants were sent an email as a reminder of the scheduled focus group one week in advance and again three days in advance. The day before the scheduled session, participants were contacted via phone to reconfirm their attendance at the session.

Three focus group sessions were held with a combined total of 12 participants. The sessions were conducted using a facilitator transcript that was modified from the CAGE report (Drago et al., 2005) and within the constructs of the SCCT (see Appendix E). Each session was video recorded for later analysis. The researcher led the focus group; however, moderators provided independent review of the focus group sessions. One moderator was responsible for operating the video recording, taking detailed notes during the session, and providing a summary of the discussion at the conclusion of each session. A second moderator was used to review the taped sessions and draw independent conclusions about the sessions' themes. Specific instructions for completing each of these responsibilities was given by the researcher prior to the

sessions. Each focus group session was limited to one hour. At the conclusion of each focus group session, participants were given a demographic questionnaire (Appendix F) to complete as well as follow-up information about the study (Appendix G). The follow-up information included a debriefing with more detailed information about the study as well as contact information for the researcher should participants have had further questions.

### **Instruments**

The facilitator transcript for the focus groups was modified from the CAGE project by Drago et al. (2005). The questions were altered to reflect the specific topic of the study and to repeat the key constructs of the SCCT – self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and the establishment of personal goals. The sequence of the questions was also reviewed within the recommendations of Krueger and Casey (2000) for a clear progression through opening, introductory, transition, key and ending questions to guide the group through a complete dialogue. The opening questions intended to make participants comfortable with divulging information in a group setting by asking a question to reveal commonalities. These questions were easy to answer to build confidence. Introductory questions, which give insight to the topic of interest, encouraged conversation through an open ended format. Transition questions directed the conversation to the key questions in the study. These transition questions allowed for participants to gain insight into others' views on the particular subject. Key questions made up the largest segment of the focus group and the greatest amount of time was spent on this type of question. These key questions also reflected the constructs of the SCCT. Ending questions closed the focus group and help participants reflect on the comments of the group and clarify any previous comments. This study used a final summary question in which the facilitator and moderator gave a short oral summary of the discussion, as related to the key questions, and asked

participants if the summary was accurate and adequate. This final summary question was used for later analysis of the results.

### **Review of Instruments**

The facilitator transcript was reviewed by a panel of academicians and practitioners in the field to, first evaluate each question individually, and second, evaluate the questions in relation to each other. When reviewing each question individually, the panel evaluated if the questions were clear, sounded conversational, were easy to say, short in length, open-ended and one dimensional. When reviewing the questions in relation to each other, the panel judged the flow of the transcript. Specifically, the panel was asked if the questions were easy in the beginning, follow a reasonable progression, and moved from general to specific. The members of the supervisory committee, also reviewed the facilitator transcript in relation to the key constructs of the SCCT.

A pilot focus group was conducted prior to the study with three former University of Florida female student-athletes. Those selected for the pilot study were recruited by the researcher. All three participants had exhausted their eligibility as a student-athlete, and therefore did not meet the criteria of the subjects in this study, but were pursuing a career in collegiate athletics through internships with the University Athletic Association. The pilot focus group was conducted using the exact procedures of this study. The purpose of conducting a pilot study was twofold. First, the pilot study served as a practice for the researcher in executing the focus group. Feedback was given from the moderators and participants regarding the researcher's role in facilitating the session and the structure of the questions asked during the session. Second, the data collected during the pilot study was used as comparison data for this study.

## **Data Analysis**

All data analysis was exploratory in nature, and sought to find themes in the process of choosing to pursue a career in coaching or athletics administration in collegiate athletics.

Analysis began with participant selection through the Initial Questionnaire (see Appendix B) and continued concurrently with data collection. Notes were taken during each focus group session and a summary of the groups' discussions was provided at the conclusion to allow for verification by participants. Further, the researcher and moderator present for the session briefly analyzed after each session to improve upon subsequent sessions. The completion of a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix F) was the last method employed to gather data.

This study used abridged transcripts for content analysis. The video recording of each session were used by the researcher to write the abridged transcripts. The transcripts were then confirmed by the two moderators. The video recordings were used for clarification as needed. Once complete, the abridged transcripts were examined for common themes. All responses were grouped according to the question they address. Once appropriately categorized, a brief description of the responses to the question was written. These summaries were then analyzed for common themes that occur throughout the responses. The final report was written structured around these themes as they related to the purpose of this study. This final report included a narrative of the focus groups. Lastly, interpretations and recommendations of the study were given.

## CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

This qualitative study explored the career development path of female student-athletes at the University of Florida intending to pursue careers in collegiate athletics. The data collected in this study attempted to address the need for more focused research on the positive influences leading current female student-athletes to enter the field. This chapter discusses the results of the study in three sections. The first section describes the participants in the study. The second section presents the common themes uncovered in the focus groups. The third section discusses similarities and differences of the sample with the pilot study.

### **Demographics of Sample**

Using Qualtrics Survey Software, 262 current University of Florida female student-athletes were distributed the Request for Participation survey (see Appendix A). A total of 45 responses were gathered for a response rate of seventeen percent (17%, n=45). Of the respondents, the largest proportion were freshmen (36%, n=16) followed by seniors (31%, n=14), sophomores (18%, n=8), juniors (9%, n=4) and graduate students (7%, n=3). The women's sport with the largest responses rate was track and field (33.33%, n=15). Other women's sports were as follows: lacrosse and swimming (15.56%, n=7), gymnastics, soccer, softball and volleyball (6.67%, n=3), and basketball and golf (4.44%, n=2). No responses were received from tennis. The distribution of respondents by sport is shown in Table 4-1.

The largest percentage of respondents were completing their degree from the College of Health and Human Performance (31.11%, n=14) followed by Liberal Arts and Sciences (22.22%, n=10), Warrington College of Business Administration (15.56%, n=7), Agricultural and Life Science (13.33, n=6), Journalism and Communications (8.89%, n=4) and Design, Construction

and Planning, Education, Nursing, and Public Health and Health Professions (2.22%, n=1). The distribution of respondents by college is shown in Table 4-2.

Table 4-1. Distribution of respondents by sport

Sport	Frequency	Percent %
Basketball	2	4.44%
Golf	2	4.44%
Gymnastics	3	6.67%
Lacrosse	7	15.56%
Soccer	3	6.67%
Softball	3	6.67%
Swimming	7	15.56%
Tennis	0	0.00%
Track & Field	15	33.33%
Volleyball	3	6.67%
Total	45	100.00%

Table 4-2. Distribution of respondents by college

College	Frequency	Percent %
Agricultural and Life Sciences	6	13.33%
Business Administration	7	15.56%
Design, Construction and Planning	1	2.22%
Education	1	2.22%
Health and Human Performance	14	31.11%
Journalism and Communications	4	8.89%
Liberal Arts & Sciences	10	22.22%
Nursing	1	2.22%
Public Health and Health Professions	1	2.22%
Total	45	100.00%

The initial questionnaire used four Likert scale questions to determine whether the respondent's future career plans included working in collegiate athletics. Sixty-nine percent (69%, n=31) of the respondents indicated some level of agreement to the statement "After graduation I plan to pursue a career in sports other than as a professional athlete". Interestingly, the same percentage, (69%, n=31) showed agreement with the statement "After graduation I plan to pursue a career outside of sports". Slightly less, (51%, n=23) showed agreement with the statement, "After graduation I plan to pursue a career in collegiate athletics". The majority of

these respondents, (33%, n=15), selected “slightly agree” the lowest level of agreement and only one respondent selected “completely agree”. However, respondents showed an increase in the level of agreement (57%, n=26) to the statement “In 5 to 10 years I can see myself working in collegiate athletics”. The respondents also showed a more even distribution between the level of agreement as 29% (n=13) “slightly agreed”, 24% (n=11) “mostly agreed” and 4% (n=2) “completely agreed” with the statement. Sixty percent, (69%, n=27) agreed to further contact about participating in a focus group on the topic. Of those, 19 respondents met the criteria to participate. The criteria for selection were set as follows:

1. Any level of agreement with the statement, “In 5 to 10 years, I can see myself working in collegiate athletics”
2. Any level of agreement with the statement, “After graduation I plan to pursue a career in collegiate athletics”

### **Demographics of Participants**

Three focus group sessions were held with a combined total of 12 participants. Of those who participated the majority were freshmen (50%, n=6) with equal representation of sophomores, juniors, and seniors (16.67%, n=2). Participants averaged 19.42 years in age. Four participants (33.33%, n=4) identified their race as black or African American, and eight participants (66.67%, n=8) identified their race as white or Caucasian. Track and Field was the most represented sport with six (50%, n=6) participants and the following sports all had one participant (8.33%, n=1); golf, gymnastics, lacrosse, soccer, softball and volleyball. There were no participants from basketball, swimming or tennis. Table 4-3 shows the distribution of participants by sport.

The largest percentage of participants were seeking degrees from the College of Health and Human Performance (33.33%, n=4) followed by an equal distribution of participants seeking degrees in Agricultural and Life Science (16.67%, n=2), Warrington College of Business

Administration (16.67%, n=2), Journalism and Communications (16.67%, n=2), and College of Liberal Arts & Sciences (16.67%, n=2). Table 4-4 shows the distribution of participants by college.

Table 4-3. Distribution of participants by sport

Sport	Frequency	Percent %
Basketball	0	0.00%
Golf	1	8.33%
Gymnastics	1	8.33%
Lacrosse	1	8.33%
Soccer	1	8.33%
Softball	1	8.33%
Swimming	0	0.00%
Tennis	0	0.00%
Track & Field	6	50.00%
Volleyball	1	8.33%
Total	12	100.00%

Table 4-4. Distribution of participants by college

College	Frequency	Percent %
Agricultural and Life Sciences	2	16.67%
Business Administration	2	16.67%
Health and Human Performance	4	33.33%
Journalism and Communications	2	16.67%
Liberal Arts & Sciences	2	16.67%
Total	12	100.00%

All participants showed a change in response to at least one statement of the four screening Likert scale statements used in the initial questionnaire (see Appendix A) when completed after the focus group session (see Demographic Questionnaire, Appendix F). Three participants (25%, n=3) demonstrated a change in response to all four statements. These changes also showed that the participants had a higher level of agreement to pursuing a career in collegiate athletics after participating in the focus group discussion as determined by their response to the two statements used as selection criteria for participation. Prior to participating in the focus group, ten

respondents (n=10) indicated some level of agreement with the statement, “After graduation I plan to pursue a career in collegiate athletics.” However, seven respondents (n=7) selected the lowest level of agreement “slightly agree”. Table 4-5 shows all responses of the participants to the Likert scale statements on the initial questionnaire.

Table 4-5. Responses of participants to initial questionnaire.

	Completely Agree	Mostly Agree	Slightly Agree	Completely Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Slightly Disagree
After graduation I plan to pursue a career in sports other than as a professional athlete:	6	3	2	1	0	0
After graduation I plan to pursue a career in collegiate athletics:	1	2	7	0	2	0
After graduation I plan to pursue a career outside of sports:	1	5	3	0	0	3
In 5 to 10 years, I can see myself working in collegiate athletics:	1	3	6	0	0	2

After participating in a focus group, eleven participants (n=11) showed agreement to the statement, “After graduation I plan to pursue a career in collegiate athletics”. The majority of responses (n=6) still reflected the lowest level of agreement, “slightly agree”, but the responses “mostly agree” and “completely agree” both showed an increase by one response (n=3, n=2). Similar findings occurred with the statement “In 5 to 10 years I can see myself working in collegiate athletics”. Again, initially only ten respondents (n=10) showed some level of agreement with the majority of responses (n=6) being “slightly agree”. After participating in a focus group, eleven respondents showed some level of agreement, this time with the majority (n=5) selecting “mostly agree” and the response “completely agree” increasing by one (n=2). Table 4-6 shows responses to the demographic questionnaire after participating in a focus group.

Table 4-6. Responses of participants to demographic questionnaire.

	Completely Agree	Mostly Agree	Slightly Agree	Completely Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Slightly Disagree
After graduation I plan to pursue a career in sports other than as a professional athlete:	3	2	6	0	1	0
After graduation I plan to pursue a career in collegiate athletics:	2	3	6	0	1	0
After graduation I plan to pursue a career outside of sports:	3	2	3	0	1	3
In 5 to 10 years, I can see myself working in collegiate athletics:	2	5	4	0	0	1

### Findings

The following themes emerged from the three focus groups held with current female student-athletes at the University of Florida: (1) Experiences in Sport; (2) Familiarity; (3) Social Networks; (4) Role Models; (5) Delay of Entry into the Field.

#### Experiences in Sport

Experience and involvement as a student-athlete at the University of Florida raised individuals' level of awareness to the different career opportunities in collegiate athletics. Coaching was the most identified career; however, "advisors" and "any job with an athletic association" were the second most identified positions. When asked how they learned about the specific jobs within collegiate athletics some identified just the experience of "being around it". Others expressed the idea that the environment was unique at the University of Florida. "Being here in this scale of an environment kind of opens your eyes to how many different careers you can have being involved with the University Athletic Association." One participant acknowledged observing these different positions began as early as her recruiting trip. "When I first took my visit [I] got to meet everyone and realized there is someone for every specific thing."

There was a mix between recognizing only traditional jobs within collegiate athletics (i.e. coaches and athletic directors) and recognizing a variety of very specific positions. On average, the younger participants were limited in their awareness to coaching. Specifically, in one focus group of five participants (which included three freshmen), four answered “coaching” when asked to pick an ideal career in collegiate athletics. This limited perception of collegiate athletic careers was exemplified by one participant stating, “Coaching. It’s the only thing I know.” The older participants were able to verbalize specific positions in multiple departments. One department in particular, the Office of Student Life (OSL) which provides academic support for student athletes, was identified as influential in increasing awareness of different careers in collegiate athletics. When asked, “How did you learn about careers in collegiate athletics?” one participant responded, “I guess just the OSL in general because we are always interacting.” Later in the discussion when asked the question, “When did you identify collegiate athletics as a potential career path?” one participant responded:

I guess when I got here and actually seeing what the OSL does, and all the interactions that you get with everyone it seems like it would be a cool job because I always wanted...to do something with sports but I didn’t know exactly what role in sports.

Interestingly, some participants were not able to identify specific titles but could name individuals working within the University Athletic Association (UAA). This could indicate student-athletes were aware of these individuals and the role they played even without knowing specific titles, something that could be unique to UF. “You could be Jeremy Foley...or writing the news on like Gatorzone or something.” In one case, the career path was specifically shaped by a definite experience rather than general experiences as a student athlete. One participant experienced surgery over a summer and was introduced to the physician’s assistant that worked for an orthopedic surgeon. “It was really this past summer that nailed it down [working in

collegiate athletics]. After going through surgery and just to spend time with him and I just asked him a lot of questions.” The experience of an athletic injury in turn impacted her career development.

### **Familiarity**

Familiarity with sports gave participants’ confidence that if pursued, they could experience a successful career in collegiate athletics.

I’ll probably be more familiar with it than anything. I’ve been in sports since I was eight...and then being here, interacting with everyone and seeing what they do, it’s a way of life...it is something that I will do because it is all I know. Comfortable.

This familiarity led one participant to major in Sport Management, “I am used to being around athletes and working with them. So it’s familiar.” However, this familiarity also contributed to a narrowed perspective of the possible different career tracks within athletics. The majority of participants responded that coaching would be the position they would pursue within collegiate athletics and they would feel most comfortable in this position. When asked about past work experiences in the field of athletics, nearly all had participated in a coaching role while only two of the twelve participants had served in another role in athletics. This limited work experience, while giving the participants confidence for pursuit of coaching, may contribute to the limited career aspirations in athletics. One participant recognized this as she advised fellow female student-athletes to “explore the different options that there are because it’s so easy to think of just... being involved in coaching...there are so many more options”.

One participant was unique in that her familiarity with sport and coaching began long before her experience as an athlete. “That’s all I’ve really known though. My parents played volleyball and coach volleyball and even when I wasn’t playing I was always around it. So I can’t really imagine leaving it behind completely.” Similarly, participants indicated their experience as leaders on their teams gave them the confidence to pursue a career in athletics.

One participant spoke of being a captain on her high school team and learning to coach her teammates as well as practice on her own. Another mentioned completing leadership training as part of her athletic experience in college. Both of these experiences helped to generate familiarity with the sport and coaching that built their confidence in obtaining a successful future career in athletics.

### **Social Networks**

Participants' social networks had an influence in two areas of career development: (1) choosing an academic major and (2) identifying collegiate athletics as a potential career path. Participants' social networks of family members or high school environment had an influence on choice of major. One participant, a finance major who verbalized plans of using her degree in the field of collegiate athletics, said she picked her major due to her membership in a finance academy at her high school. "I went in it because my brother was in it. And it just kind of clicked and I like it. So my major in business is focusing on finance." Another participant acknowledged she "chose environmental sciences because my middle school was more conscious of environmental issues than the typical school." These responses may indicate that the choice of college major is greatly influenced by earlier educational experiences in high school and middle school. However, in the discussion of choosing an academic major, it became evident that participants experienced a change in social network around the same time period that influenced choice of major. For example, one participant relayed this story:

I came in my freshman year and wanted to be pre-med but I decided the sciences were not for me. It was because my mom worked in the hospital and I grew up around that. But I took a course in economics and business was more of my thing. That's why I decided to do Business and then Marketing.

Recognition of collegiate athletics as a potential career path began as early as high school for at least one participant. She credits her high school social network and interactions with a

high school coaches for generating her awareness of collegiate coaches. “I knew if you could be a high school coach you could be a college coach. And my coaches from high school talked about the different high school coaches that got promoted to college.” Another participant credited her larger social network of her hometown as influencing her decision to work in collegiate athletics. “I’m just a big sports fan. I grew up here so I’m a big Gator fan. In Gainesville, there is not that much to do except to go to Gator sporting events.” Family member comprises the third segment of a social network that influenced participants to pursue a career in collegiate athletics. One participant stated, “My mom’s been a coach for 13 years of my life. She would pick me up from school and we would go on the bus with her middle school and I was just around watching her coach her teams.” Another contributed, “My relative is a manager of the Padres so I talked to him about a career in sports and he talked about how collegiate athletics is booming more than professional sports with job opportunities.”

Participants were able to identify the importance of building a strong social network in whatever field an individual has an interest in advancing in as a career. When asked, “What advice would you give a fellow female student-athlete who wants to pursue a career in collegiate athletics?” many answers revolved around building your social network. Responses included:

You just got to talk to people

Asking your coach about it

Tell them to ask questions and talk to people in the field

Know people, that’s a big one

Yet these answers were limited as they did not indicate who should be included in your social network in order to pursue collegiate athletics. Rather participants reverted to just the general “people” and only one mentioned a specific person, “your coach”.

## **Role Models**

Few role models were identified by participants but they were influential to the student-athletes' recognition of collegiate athletics as a potential career path. The younger participants were more likely to identify role models from high school, especially coaches. One participant, speaking of her high school coaches, said, "They told me the blunt truth that the pay is not that good, but most coaches just have a true passion for it and if you want to be around athletics it is a good way to go." Another participant answered, "Just being around different coaches opens your eyes to good and bad things." For these two participants there was no one individual coach identified as a role model, rather those who held the position of coach were perceived as a generic role model. Only two participants were able to identify specific individuals who directly impacted their career path, guiding them to consider collegiate athletics.

One participant, a senior, identified specific people working within the UAA; Lynda Tealer, the Senior Woman Administrator, and Jeremy Foley, the Athletic Director. When asked, "How did you learn about careers in collegiate athletics?" she answered, "I guess here at least, Jeremy Foley is very interactive and he knows us and is always talking with us." Furthermore, she knew the career path of the Athletic Director when referencing the importance of getting involved even if it's just an internship. "Think about where Jeremy Foley started. He was in the ticket office and he worked his way up and look how successful he is now. He is the best AD in the country." The same participant, when asked "Are there any individuals who helped you in your decision to pursue collegiate athletics as a career?" responded "I really love what Lynda Tealer does, she's the AD of all the women's sports and so she has been one of the influences in my potential decision to work in athletics." When prompted, "And how has she influenced you specifically?" she stated, "Just the way that she does her job. I see what she does, and who she works with and what she gets to do and it seems really rewarding."

The second participant identified her high school athletic director.

I was working with her since I was a freshman and up until I graduated. I pretty much went wherever she went, traveled with the football team and basketball team. I worked hands on with all the sports. She was a major influence on me.

This unique experience of working with a high school athletic director influenced the participant's choice of major, she wants to pursue Sport Management, and it strengthened her resolve to work in athletics.

When I first got to [high school] I didn't know much about sports, or football. I didn't think that I would have an opportunity to travel with [the football team] and be able to see what they are experiencing just by being her assistant. It was a good experience for me and it made me want to help them and have a future job in that position.

### **Delay of Entry into the Field**

Many of the participants had post graduation plans for pursuing careers outside of collegiate athletics. However, most participants never discredited athletics as a possible career path. When asked, "When did you identify collegiate athletics as a potential career path?" one participant answered, "I don't want to pursue collegiate athletics at the moment but maybe down the road." Some participants expressed a need to find other strengths besides athletics and then perhaps return to working within sports. One participant related this to her team environment and wanting to function as an individual outside of a team.

When I leave I want to kind of be my own person for the first time in four years. Like I'll have been part of something, something special, but still I want to do something special on my own. And I'll probably miss being part of that type of community that type of family which is the primary reason I think I'll be coming back.

Another participant noted that student-athletes might feel a loss of identify with graduation and leaving their sport.

I think when people get out of their sport and they graduate they think, 'What am I going to do now? It's all I've done my whole life'. I haven't done a lot with collegiate athletics but I have pursued a lot of other things....I have just done more

random things to broaden my horizons and learn more than just the sport I have been playing my whole life. So my jobs, I haven't really pursued within lacrosse because I just want to make sure that I can do something else too.

This participant was the only one who voiced deliberately working outside of athletics to explore other interests. Some participants responded they would advise fellow female student-athletes to "Just make sure it's what you want to do" when pursuing a career in collegiate athletics. Another participant, a senior, advised "...it's really important to find out the things that you don't want to do because it may lead you to discover what you do want to do". Her statement, especially as a participant farther along in the career development process, reiterates this theme of delay of entry into the field. The participants, although interested in a career in college athletics, were not actively pursuing this career track as they still demonstrated uncertainty in their career interests. This uncertainty can be attributed to their limited experience in areas outside of athletics in part caused by the time demands of being an athlete. As one participant explained in detailing her post-graduation plans, "It's time to get an internship just because I haven't really been able to with training."

### **Comparisons with the Pilot Study**

The pilot study was conducted with the purpose of refining the focus group questions, creating additional probing questions, and fine-tuning the process. However, it also served a secondary purpose of collecting comparison data as the older age group provided greater insight into influences on their career paths. The focus group consisted of three former University of Florida female student-athletes all employed in entry level positions within the University Athletic Association.

### **Similarities**

Participants of the pilot study were able to identify similar job positions within collegiate athletics and also contributed their awareness of such positions to just being around athletics as a

student-athlete at the University of Florida. They identified some of the same role models in Lynda Tealer and Jeremy Foley. Two of the participants directly contributed their decision to pursue collegiate athletics to interactions with Lynda Tealer during their undergraduate experience. Both identified becoming a Senior Woman Administrator as the future role they intend to pursue in collegiate athletics. The third participant noted two different male role models, her academic advisor and high school athletic director. This participant was less decided in her future career path noting she would like to remain in “contact with the student-athletes” but “not sure of a specific role.” These results coincide with those of the focus groups. Individuals who identified a female role model that played a significant role or was highly visible, indicated stronger interest in pursuing a career in collegiate athletics measured by higher levels of agreement with the two statements: “After graduation, I plan to pursue a career in athletics” and “In 5 to 10 years I can see myself working in collegiate athletics”. Interestingly, up until their current positions in internships or post graduate assistantships, the participants had only worked as an age group coach or summer camp coach in the field of athletics. The participants in the focus groups held similar working backgrounds.

### **Differences**

The greatest difference in the pilot study was the further developed career paths of the participants. For example, one participant in particular elaborated on her plan to eventually become an SWA. She clearly identified her goals and specific tasks to achieve this career track. Her advanced career development, in comparison to the focus groups’ participants, could possibly be attributed to the older age of the pilot study. However, other influences may have contributed. Specifically, this participant mentioned an advisor that guided her in exploring the past career tracks of SWAs at other institutions. This advisor had an impact on her career development. Another difference documented in the pilot study was participants’ desire to “give

back” and “influence people” as a reason for entry into a career in collegiate athletics. Only one participant of twelve in the focus group sample verbalized this idea of giving back. Lastly, role models had a much larger influence on participants in the pilot study as these role models often acted more as mentors. In particular, the participants spoke at length about the personal influence Lynda Tealer and Jeremy Foley had on their career development. The participants of this study had not experienced such a personal impact from these two athletic administrators quite like those of the pilot study.

## CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter interprets the findings of the study in two parts. First, this chapter relates the findings to the general goals and research questions posed by this study. Second, the themes as discussed in the previous chapter are applied to the theoretical framework of the SCCT. This research is unique in that the focus is on the positive influences. The research questions this study intended to answer were:

1. What are common factors of influence in female student-athletes' decision to pursue careers in collegiate athletics?
2. What formative experiences influence the projected career paths of current female student-athletes pursuing collegiate athletics?
3. What are the implications for the field of collegiate athletics to encourage current female student-athletes to pursue careers in athletics?

### **Common Factors of Influence**

This section will review the common factors of influence in the participants' decision to pursue careers in collegiate athletics. The findings of this study indicate that the primary factors of influence were role models and mentors and the interactions the sample had with the Office of Student Life at the University of Florida.

### **Role Models and Mentors**

Participants in the study expressed role models had influenced their interest in a career in collegiate athletics. However, only two provided in-depth information about how these role models affected their career development. There is still little research indicating the magnitude of impact role models may have on female student-athlete pursuing a career in collegiate athletics (Demers, 2004). The findings of this study indicate that although role models, like coaches, sparked interest in a career in collegiate athletics, their influence was not enough to inspire action to actively pursue a career in collegiate athletics. Rather, as this study supports, an established

mentor-mentee relationship created greater initiative in pursuing a career in collegiate athletics. “Mentoring is a process that links an experienced individual with someone who needs support and guidance” (Lough, 2001, p. 31). The participant in this study, who identified her high school athletic director as her role model, experienced a mentor-mentee relationship and indicated a stronger level of agreement than all other participants on the Likert scale statements, indicating pursuit of a career in collegiate athletics. According to Lough (2001), “A true mentoring relationship cannot be established until the athlete acknowledges an interest in pursuing [collegiate athletics] as a career” (p. 32). However, this study would suggest that unsolicited mentoring is needed to recruit female student-athletes into a career in collegiate athletics. For instance, the participant with the mentor experience in high school has already expressed an interest in majoring in Sport Management. Thus, it can be argued her mentor relationship initiated her pursuit of a career in collegiate athletics as shown by her choice of major.

Wicker’s study of African American women athletics administrators also noted the importance of role models and mentors for career success. Beyond looking to influential women in the field for inspiration, Wicker’s participants indicated the belief that women help to advance each other had a strong impact over their individual career development (2008). Lough (2001) explored the potential impact of mentoring in helping female student-athletes advance to head coaching positions. She emphasized the need for formal internships with the provision of a mentor necessary for females to advance in the field. “Even though mentoring is not new, the idea of women in sports serving as mentors to other women in order to help them along the leadership path is a relatively novel one” (p. 31). Participants in this study also recognized this notion of learning from a mentor. “It is important because when you start at the bottom, you

learn from people above you who are good at what they do. And that's how you progress and get better and get the promotions.”

### **Interactions with the Office of Student Life**

Participants of this study credited the department responsible for academic support of student-athletes, as increasing their awareness of careers in collegiate athletics. Their statements expressed the need for an interactive student-athlete support center on campus to advance career development within collegiate athletics. “Higher education institutions have realized their obligation to provide a supportive environment as soon as possible for student-athletes to succeed” (Carodine, Almond & Gratto, 2001, p. 21). Carodine et al. (2001) suggest holistic support should be available to student-athletes including services for academic advisement, personal development, and career development. The authors further outlined specific action steps and formal programs that should be offered for student-athletes to provide all three areas of support. Recommendations for career development include administering interest inventories, holding workshops, and providing career counseling. However, in this study the student-athletes did not mention any specific program offered by the OSL which impacted their interest in career development in collegiate athletics. Rather the participants credited “...just being in the OSL and talking with our academic advisors” as the reason for their awareness to careers in collegiate athletics.

This finding of an influential student-athlete support center on campus may be generalized to the larger population. In 1991, the NCAA established legislation requiring all member institutions to provide academic counseling to student-athletes (Abell, 2000). This legislation only established that academic counseling must take place, not that a separate student-athlete support center be developed. Yet, many institutions have an established student-athlete support center. In October of 2009 the NCAA News released a study indicated that 92% of Division I

institutions reported increased or steady spending on academic support services for their student-athletes (Hosick, 2009). Allocation of such funds indicates the universal emphasis placed on student-athlete support as this data was gathered during an economic downturn which caused many institutions to make budget cuts. Thus, the majority of Division I institutions recognize the value of these support centers in the holistic development of student-athletes and are allocating additional funds (Carodine et al., 2001).

### **Common Formative Experiences**

This section will review the common formative experiences that influenced the career paths of the female student-athletes sampled. The findings of this study indicated that the common formative experiences can be organized into two categories. First, participants shared the student-athlete experience. Second, the participants' also demonstrated delayed and limited career development.

#### **Student-Athlete Experience**

Many of the participants were lifelong athletes, as self-reported on the demographic questionnaires and discussed in the focus groups. "I've been in sports since I was eight...it's a way of life" said one participant. Their further experiences as student-athletes at the University of Florida gave the participants insight into careers in collegiate athletics and a sense of confidence about entry into a nontraditional field. Predominantly, the participants intended to enter the field as a coach as most identified coaching as their future career role of choice. This career choice is logical as the majority of their athletic experience was spent with their coach. These results contradicted those of Demers (2004) who found that participants lacked confidence even though they had participated at an elite level in their sports. Perhaps, the confidence level of this sample could be contributed to their unique experience as UF student-athletes.

Although the majority of the participants' responses were limited to "coaching" when discussing future roles within college athletics, past research has documented that this role can lead to other career tracks. Wicker (2008) noted the majority of her participants, African American female administrators in collegiate athletics, began their careers as coaches. The same career path was documented in a study by Tiell (2004), which noted 58% of the participants in her study began their careers with coaching or teaching experiences. Therefore, in many cases coaching can be an entry level position that leads to other opportunities within collegiate athletics. Also, participants further along in their career development were more likely to note multiple career paths within collegiate athletics. Therefore, it appeared there was a positive correlation between years of experience as a student-athlete and increased awareness of varying careers within collegiate athletics.

### **Delayed and Limited Career Development**

Experience as a student-athlete builds work related skills, but it also limits time spent in self exploration of other interests and career pursuits. This limited self exploration was evident through participants' expression to learn about their strengths other than athletics. Many described plans of getting out of sports and working in a different field before making a decision to pursue a career in athletics. Almost all student-athletes put off this exploration until after finished with their sport. However, many advised fellow female student-athletes interested in a career in college athletics to begin career exploration earlier.

"For a number of reasons, it seems that varsity student-athletes, especially at large Division I universities, may not dedicate much thought or effort to developing a career path." (Martens & Lee, 1998, p. 123). Martens and Lee (1998) outline five different explanations for why student-athletes demonstrate lower levels of career development: (1) lack of time (2) imposed structure that limits self exploration (3) higher levels of anxiety in career exploration due to strong athletic

identity (4) strong commitment to sport and (5) lack of integration into campus. As noted in Wicker's study, female administrators in the field found that their career focus in athletics did not form until graduate school (2008). The pilot study also confirmed that at least one participant began her pursuit of a career in collegiate athletics with enrollment in a graduate program. Although this delay in decision making may be the standard for field, education and awareness of careers in athletics needs to begin earlier if the female student-athlete population is to be recruited.

### **Applications to the SCCT**

The primary purpose of SCCT is to identify the processes of career development including identification of academic and occupational interests and promotion of "career-relevant choices" (Lent, Hackett & Brown, 1996, p. 6). Therefore, this study applied the responses of participants to this social cognitive framework to understand the processes of career development for these female student-athletes interested in a career in collegiate athletics. Lent, Hackett and Brown (1996) described three variables – self efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals – as the "building blocks" of SCCT (p. 8). Thus, to assess the processes of career development of this sample, responses were analyzed within each of these three variables.

#### **Self Efficacy**

As defined by Bandura (1986), self-efficacy is "people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances" (p. 391). Wicker (2008) describes self-efficacy as "the confidence to perform career specific tasks" (p. 103). In this study, participants' self-efficacy for a career in collegiate athletics was demonstrated through the theme of familiarity. Many responses indicated that athletics was "comfortable" and "familiar" as they were life-long athletes and they felt capable working in the field. Such self-efficacy can be built through four primary sources – performance

accomplishments, vicarious learning, social persuasion, and physiological reactions (Lent, Hackett & Brown, 1996). In this case, and in congruence with the researchers, performance accomplishments had the greatest influence over the participants' self-efficacy. By the very nature of the sample, elite athletes at a Division I institution, all have accomplished great feats in their respective sports. This study also found that role models in the field of collegiate athletics influenced the participants' self-efficacy which concurs with past research (Schere et al., 1991; Nauta et al, 1998). Further, those participants who identified a successful female role model presented higher levels of aspirations to pursue a career in collegiate athletics through responses on the demographic questionnaire.

Viewed from another perspective, individuals often eliminate careers which they believe to be beyond their capabilities (Bandura, 1986). Although responses from participants lacked a strong commitment to a career path in collegiate athletics, as many indicated a desire to pursue other opportunities before returning to athletics, none were eliminating the career path completely. Keeping the option open to pursue careers in collegiate athletics would suggest participants do feel capable in their skills for such a career. As such, academic and occupational interests can be influenced by one's self-efficacy beliefs (Brown & Lent, 1996). Therefore, the strongest recruiting strategy to bring female student-athletes into the field should be to develop, cultivate and retain this self belief.

### **Outcome Expectations**

An individual's outcome expectation, or certainty of the consequences of particular actions, is based upon self-efficacy for a specific behavior and the belief of the likely effects of that behavior. Lent, Hackett and Brown (1996) argued that individuals will avoid certain careers if they do not believe they are capable, even if they career is associated with positive outcomes (e.g. a high salary). This study noted an opposite relationship. Participants were hesitant in

actively pursuing a career in athletics due to neutral or negative outcome expectations even though they perceived themselves as capable. Such results are congruent with the argument of Brown and Lent (1996) that individuals may eliminate careers due to low self-efficacy, poor outcome expectations, or both factors combined. In this study, the participants had the necessary self-efficacy, or belief, to take action to attain a career in athletics, however, they were still uncertain about the outcomes associated with working in athletics. For example, while observing current coaches, one participant commented,

Coaching sounds fun, but I don't know if I want to deal with all the stress...that I have seen our coach go through. It's hard to be in that type of position, especially in her position where it's the first year we have lost the SEC regular season title. And none of us want to be part of that team. It's an extremely stressful time and I can't imagine it...so that's tremendous pressure and I don't know that I want that for the rest of my life.

Some participants noted their hesitation to enter the field of collegiate athletics because of the few opportunities for promotion.

I think the main reason why me personally I didn't want to do a career in the UAA, is that positions are never open...and if you do eventually get that job you have to start from the very bottom and wait and wait and wait until a promotion opens up.

This expectation of few advancement opportunities in the field of collegiate athletics was also reiterated as one participant recounted Jeremy Foley's journey to become the Athletic Director. "Obviously he was patient and waited, waited, waited a long time." These negative outcome expectations, of having to work hard at the bottom level for many years, hindered participants' desire to pursue careers in college athletics. Their hindered interest coincides with the research of Brown and Lent (1996) which argues that "perceptions of barriers moderate the relations between interests and occupational choices" (p. 354).

## **Personal Goals**

Establishing personal goals demonstrates intention to pursue a certain activity (Lent, Hackett & Brown, 1996). This last building block of SCCT was notably the most undeveloped among the sample. Many of the participants did not have measurable goals related to the pursuit of a career in collegiate athletics. One assumption is that these student-athletes, although they have developed goal setting abilities in sports, have not transferred the skill for career development. Nonetheless, the older participants in the sample had very specific goals for developing careers in their post graduation plans. This would suggest that student-athletes are capable of applying goal setting to their own career development. Therefore, it is possible that the young age of the sample affects this variable of their career development processes.

Another conclusion in the analysis of personal goals was the lack of goal setting for careers in collegiate athletics. Of the few that verbalized specific goals, none included steps to achieve for a career in collegiate athletics. In comparison, one participant in the pilot study had carefully developed personal goals based on the past career tracks of other females in the field of collegiate athletics. This participant was also the most confident in her pursuit of a position within collegiate athletics, and demonstrated positive outcome expectations for her future career. Her progression in her career development within all three constructs of SCCT emphasizes the dynamic relationship between the three. An individual cannot establish personal goals without self-efficacy for the career tasks and expecting positive outcomes for their efforts. Further, the fact that the participants in this study did not indicate specific goals for advancement, may weaken their level of self-efficacy and negatively affect their outcome expectations (Lent, Hackett & Brown, 1996).

## **Assessment of Career Development**

The dynamic relationship of these three key constructs allows for a snapshot of the participants' career development in regards to careers in collegiate athletics. The participants in this study demonstrated sufficient self-efficacy to enter careers in collegiate athletics. However, their interest for pursuing the field was negatively impacted by their perceived outcome expectations. In turn, the participants were undeveloped in establishing personal goals. As such, it can be inferred that the second "building block", outcome expectations, stalled advancement in the participants' career development path towards collegiate athletics, as revealed in the delay of entry theme in participants' responses. "Even persons with well-developed and differentiated interests in a particular career path will be unlikely to pursue that path if they perceive (accurately or inaccurately) substantial barriers to entering or advancing in that career" (Brown & Lent, 1996, p. 356). Thus, efforts should focus on building perceptions of positive outcomes in careers in collegiate athletics.

## **Implications for the Field**

In order to increase female student-athlete interest in careers in collegiate athletics, advances must be made on institutional level as well as with the governing body, the NCAA. Based on the findings of this study, institutions should focus on increasing pursuit in careers in athletics, especially from female student-athletes, through implementing career development programs within student-athlete support centers and by building student-athletes' social networks based on career interests. On the national level, the NCAA has already taken actions to encourage female student-athletes to pursue careers in athletics through career development programs and scholarships. However, suggestions will be made to improve accessibility to such programs.

## **Career Development Programs at the Institutional Level**

The first recommendation is to create career development programs through the student-athlete support centers. Researchers have identified the need to build an outreach program to bridge student-athletes to the main career resources on campus in order to promote career development (Carodine et al., 2001; Martens & Lee, 1998). Martens and Lee's (1998) Career Development Intervention Program for Student Athletes, progresses student-athletes through career development as they progress through four years on undergraduate education. The model is "framed in terms of life-career development" and centers around the "holistic process" of career development (p. 126). In order to implement a successful outreach program, three general steps can be adapted to each institution's unique circumstance. First, any student-athlete program must be structured through collaboration with the athletic department. As Martens and Lee (1998) recognize, it is "the administration ultimately defines the time and structural demands that guide the athlete's behavior" (p. 129). Only a career development program with the support of administration can become a practice of the "athletic culture" (p. 129).

The second step of Martens and Lee's (1998) integrated approach is the identification of program goals to help outline specific career development activities. These program goals include; addressing all logistical barriers that deter from career development (i.e. time), promoting independence in the self exploration process, expanding career options, and appreciating students' athletic identity. In reviewing the responses from participants of this study, these goals are especially important in developing a holistic career development program. For example, at least one participant identified the need to establish independence from her team in identifying her individual strengths, "When I leave, I want to be my own person for the first time in four years...I want to do something special on my own." This coincides with the second goal of Martens and Lee integrated approach to career development.

The third and fourth program goals of expanding options and appreciating athletic identity were strongly supported by the data collected in this study as necessities in the career development process of student-athletes. Martens and Lee recognize that many student-athletes do not have the opportunity to explore career options outside of their sport (1998). Perhaps this feeling of limited exploration and experience contributed to the central theme of delay of entry into the field found in this study. One participant exclaimed, “I don’t want to get all sports-ed out, do you know what I mean?” Still this participant considers collegiate athletics to be a viable career path, as she indicated sports has been and will always be “a way of life” which coincides with Martens and Lee’s fourth goal of their model, appreciating the athletic identity. Athletic identity should be integrated into the career development process to eliminate a “sport/non-sport dichotomy” mentality (p. 130).

The final step of Martens and Lee’s (1998) Career Development Intervention Program for Student Athletes, is the implementation of program activities. The researchers outline action steps to be taken at each undergraduate level and recommend such steps be completed in a regularly scheduled course. For example, freshmen should be introduced to the idea of career development and given a tour of resources on campus. At this time, self exploration and reflection should be an objective, a task that can be completed in the form of a personal mission statement. Sophomore year includes more in-depth exploration of career tracks and the selection of a major. Junior year focuses on career planning and goal setting with a primary objective of gaining experience in different fields. Finally, senior year approaches the goal of obtaining employment by developing the skills for the workforce and growing one’s network.

The Office of Student Life at the University of Florida executes a similar program of activities in its support for career development. All scholarship athletes are required to complete

a two-credit course as a freshman, and a three credit course as a senior which focuses on many of these goals. For example, the freshmen student-athletes are introduced to campus resources including the Career Resource Center and are asked to create a personal mission statement. They also complete assignments to help with major exploration. As seniors, student-athletes revisit the Career Resource Center in a formal tour, partake in career fairs by talking with employers, and develop a resume (Carodine et al., 2001). All of these actions are recommended by Martens and Lee (1998) for improving career development among student-athletes; however, not one participant in this study attributed such activities to their own career development. Of the sample, roughly 50% had completed the two-credit freshman course and two had completed the three-credit senior course. Perhaps there is still a disconnect between coursework and real life application in career development. On the other hand, many participants did attribute their interactions within the Office of Student Life to their ability to identify careers in collegiate athletics. This would suggest that certain aspects of these student-athletes' career development is influenced by the programs of the Office of Student Life, even though the magnitude of development falls short of the programs goals.

### **Building Social Networks at the Institutional Level**

Martens and Lee (1998) identified the need to guide student-athletes in building and using networks for career opportunities. Participants in the study by Wicker (2008) also realized, "It's all about networking" (p. 94). The participants in this study were able to verbalize the importance of having a strong network to advance in a career in collegiate athletics. However, the same participants were not able to be more specific than "people" in their identification of who should be in their social network. Even the individuals mentioned as role models in generating the participants' interest in a career in collegiate athletics were not mentioned as being a part of one's network. There seemed to be a gap between recognizing influential people

in the field, and taking action to include them in one's network to advance in a career. Thus, institutions should place emphasis on the accessibility of administrators and staff to the student-athletes. The social networks are not limited to current professionals in the field. The development of networks among female student-athletes can also have an impact on career development. In fact, through their participation in the focus groups, the group discussion about careers in collegiate athletics increased individuals' degree of agreement in likelihood of pursuing such a career, as measured by the demographic questionnaire.

The development of life skills coordinators within student-athlete support centers is another method the institution should use to promote strong social networks for female student-athletes. Multiple institutions assist student-athletes in networking at formal events such as job fairs. For example, at the University of Texas at Austin, the Longhorn Pride Career Day gives student-athletes the opportunity to interact with 80 companies learning about different career paths (Carodine et al., 2001). The University of Florida holds a similar event, Recruiter Roundtable, biannually. Again, the student-athletes sampled in this study did not attribute their own career development to such an event. Therefore, it is suggested that life skills coordinators help female student-athletes interested in a career in collegiate athletics build informal social networks at their own institutions. This should be done through introductions to the Senior Woman Administrator, female associate athletic directors, and prominent female head coaches. By introducing female student-athletes to successful female figures at their own institution, it gives these student-athletes an immediate network of role models and potential mentors in the field.

### **NCAA Initiatives**

The NCAA has invested in programs and scholarships to increase the number of females working in collegiate athletics. Two of these initiatives are the Ethnic Minority and Women's

Enhancement Postgraduate Scholarship for Careers in Athletics, and the NCAA Women's Leadership Symposium. These initiatives encourage at two different levels. The enhancement postgraduate scholarship works to recruit current student-athletes into the field through educational opportunities. "The goal of the enhancement programs is to increase the pool of and opportunities for qualified minority and female candidates in intercollegiate athletics through postgraduate scholarships" (NCAA Website). Each year the NCAA awards a one time scholarship to 13 female student-athletes interested in pursuing a career in athletics. The scholarship is awarded to assist with tuition costs for students entering sport management graduate studies, or similar programs that can result in a career in collegiate athletics. The NCAA Women's Leadership Symposium is designed to advance females employed at entry level positions. The symposium's goals include building a professional network for females in collegiate athletics, identifying role models and mentors in the field, and encouraging students to pursue collegiate athletics as a career path. These goals promote the overall mission of "recruitment and retention of women in athletics administration and coaching" (NCAA Website).

These NCAA initiatives are precisely the type of outreach programming that needs to occur to change the current trends of decreased female representation. On the other hand, it is difficult to determine the effectiveness of such programs for encouraging female student-athletes to pursue careers in collegiate athletics. For example, the Ethnic Minority and Women's Enhancement Postgraduate Scholarship for Careers in Athletics is designed to help minorities and women pay for a graduate degree in a field related to athletics. Yet, it is unknown how many scholarship recipients actually enter the field. Wicker (2008) noted that one of the participants in her study participated in "programs geared towards developing women and minorities as leaders in college athletics" (p. 105). However, in this study none of the participants mentioned such

programs even when asked, “What advice would you give a fellow female student-athlete wanting to pursue a career in collegiate athletics?” There appears to be a lack of awareness for these NCAA initiatives by current female student-athletes in this study. Demers (2004) similarly concluded that female student-athletes seem to be under informed about the under representation of women in collegiate athletics. Thus, the NCAA should extend its efforts by marketing these initiatives, not only with current professionals but all female student-athletes. Ingenuity should be used in determining how to reach this population through methods like social networking and mass media outlets.

### **Limitations**

The results of this study were limited by the lack of initial response rate. Two hundred and sixty-two current female student-athletes at the University of Florida were e-mailed an Initial Request for Participation (see Appendix A). Forty-five female student-athletes responded by completing the online survey for a response rate of 17%. The low response rate can be attributed, in part, to the population as student-athletes experience extensive time demands due to their sport. Further, the results of this study were limited to those female student-athletes who were willing to participate. Of the 45 respondents, 60% consented to further participation in a focus group and 40% of respondents declined. The data of this study was limited to those 60% who agreed to participate and were eligible to participate. Valuable data may have been lost in the 40% of respondents who declined to participate but met the selection criteria. Lastly, of those who were selected to participate in the focus group only 63% (n=12) actually attended a session. A total of 19 female student-athletes, who responded that they were interested in participating in a focus group and met the criteria, were selected and placed in a focus group.

The results of this study were also limited due to the age of the participants. Fifty percent of the participants were freshmen and therefore an underdeveloped career path was to be

expected. This was especially evident when comparing responses of the younger participants to the seniors in the group and even more evident when responses are compared with those of the pilot study. However, the younger participants still contributed valuable information and having a range in age allowed for insight across academic years.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

In order to increase the number of female student-athletes entering careers in collegiate athletics it is important to execute further research studies. Varying types of longitudinal data need to be gathered to understand the multiple factors influencing female student-athletes' career paths. First, data should document the career path of current female student-athletes who express an interest in a career in collegiate athletics to discover the percentage of those identified that actually enter the field. For example, female student-athletes at multiple institutions can be sampled about their career interests. Those who express an interest in collegiate athletics can be sampled in future years to track their career path. This data would allow researchers to identify what percentage of female student-athletes, of those who identify an interest, actually pursue a career in collegiate athletics. Further, it would explore the "Delay of Entry into the Field" theme found in this study. Data could actually support whether former female student-athletes return to work in collegiate athletics after a period of exploring other career options.

Other future studies need to sample all those former female student-athletes currently employed in entry level positions, such as internships or graduate assistantships, within collegiate athletics. This type of sample will be identical to the sample used in the pilot study and should seek to repeat the methods used in this study. The purpose of conducting such research would be to expand upon the current data collected. The older sample could provide greater information about specific steps to be taken to enter the field. Further, it provides insight into the influences leading those female student-athletes into a career in athletics. These future studies

should hold comparison focus groups with male student-athletes to compare common themes and influences. By using a comparison group of male student-athletes, researchers could also isolate the influence of gender in the data.

### **Summary**

This study gathered qualitative data from twelve current female student-athletes at the University of Florida interested in pursuing a career in collegiate athletics. Five common themes in their career development in the field of collegiate athletics were revealed through the groups' conversations: (1) Experiences in Sport; (2) Familiarity; (3) Social Networks; (4) Role Models; and (5) Delay of Entry into the Field. The groups' discussions and common themes were used to answer the research questions posed by this study:

1. What are common factors of influence in female student-athletes' decision to pursue careers in collegiate athletics?
2. What formative experiences influence the projected career paths of current female student-athletes pursuing collegiate athletics?
3. What are the implications for the field of collegiate athletics to encourage current female student-athletes to pursue careers in athletics?

Lastly, the responses were analyzed within the constructs of the SCCT to determine the career development path of the participants. The findings of this study suggest a complexity of influences affect current female student-athletes in their pursuit of careers in collegiate athletics. It is my opinion that the initiatives set in place by the NCAA and the growing awareness of the membership to the underrepresentation of females in collegiate athletics will have a profound impact on the field. This impact will continue to lag behind the efforts being made as career development is a lengthy and ongoing process. As such, more females will enter collegiate athletics and will advance in the field with the current programming and encouragement in place. But, institutions should be wary of depending on the NCAA to correct the imbalance. Conscious

decisions must be made to reach the female student-athlete population to expose them to positive experiences within careers in athletics. A current female professional in the field stated, “It would have been helpful to have been able to see somebody that looked like me doing something that I wanted to do” (Wicker, 2008, p. 79). Thus, the “keys to access” are the visibility and accessibility of female administrators and coaches and their responsibility to serve as mentors and role models to all female student athletes.

“We’re at a point where we’ve lost a number of women who entered the field 10 or 20 years ago. As young female student-athletes go through our high school and college programs, if they don’t see a lot of women in leadership roles, they don’t see a career in athletics as an option. So we have to talk it up – we have to sell it” (NCAA News, 2010). Joni Comstock, NCAA Senior Vice President for Championships, spoke these words at a Peach Belt Conference seminar. The seminar invited current female student-athletes who were interested in pursuing a career in collegiate athletics from thirteen institutions. For one attendee the seminar reiterated the positive aspects of working in athletics as she noted the “enthusiasm” women in the field have for their positions. Initiatives like this seminar combined with institutional efforts for individual career development are the keys to increasing female representation in leadership roles in collegiate athletics.

APPENDIX A  
REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATION

Dear Student-Athlete:

My name is Claire Smith. I am a graduate student in the Tourism, Recreation and Sport Management department of the College of Health and Human Performance at the University of Florida. Currently, I am conducting research for my master's thesis. The topic of my thesis is: Influences in the Career Development of Female Student-Athletes Pursuing a Career in Collegiate Athletics.

The purpose of this study is to explore reasons why current female student-athletes plan to pursue a future career in collegiate athletics. Specifically, this research will attempt to identify common influences that lead to developing a career path towards collegiate athletics.

This research will help those in the field better understand the influences leading female student-athletes to pursue entry. As females are underrepresented in leadership positions within collegiate athletics, identifying positive influences can better recruit females into the field and promote greater gender equity.

If you have an interest in pursuing a career in collegiate athletics you may qualify to participate in this study. Please complete a short questionnaire at [http://ufltrsm.qualtrics.com/SE?SID=SV\\_b9Iw5q5ss6DCawY&SVID=Prod](http://ufltrsm.qualtrics.com/SE?SID=SV_b9Iw5q5ss6DCawY&SVID=Prod). I will select 12 to 24 participants to conduct two or three focus group sessions. Each session will last no longer than 2 hours.

At the start of the focus group participants will be asked to sign a consent form. Sessions will be videotaped for research purposes only and participants' names and other personal identifiers will not be included in the study. For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, you may contact the UFIRB office, University of Florida, PO Box 112250, Gainesville, FL 32611 or by phone at (352) 392-0433.

By participating in this study, you may potentially benefit by interacting female student-athletes with similar career interests. Such discussion may help in the advancement of your career development. There are no anticipated risks associated with participating in this study.

If you have further questions about this study you may contact:

Claire Smith  
(919) 360-4369  
[ClaireS@gators.uaa.ufl.edu](mailto:ClaireS@gators.uaa.ufl.edu)

Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to participate, please submit your response through the link provided above within two weeks.

Sincerely,

Claire Smith

APPENDIX B  
INITIAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Year in School (please select one):

Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Graduate Student	Other
<input type="checkbox"/>					

Sport: \_\_\_\_\_

Major: \_\_\_\_\_

After graduation I plan to pursue a career in sports other than as a professional athlete.

Completely Agree	Mostly Agree	Slightly Agree	Slightly Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Completely Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>					

After graduation I plan to pursue a career in collegiate athletics.

Completely Agree	Mostly Agree	Slightly Agree	Slightly Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Completely Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>					

After graduation I plan to pursue a career outside of sports.

Completely Agree	Mostly Agree	Slightly Agree	Slightly Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Completely Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>					

In 5 to 10 years, I can see myself working in collegiate athletics.

Completely Agree	Mostly Agree	Slightly Agree	Slightly Disagree	Mostly Disagree	Completely Disagree
<input type="checkbox"/>					

By submitting this information, I understand that I may be contacted by phone or email to participate in a focus group of female student-athletes pursuing careers in collegiate athletics. I also understand that participation in this questionnaire and a future focus group is voluntary.

- Yes, you may contact me about participation in a focus group.
- No, you may not contact me about participation in a focus group.

APPENDIX C  
FOLLOW UP RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear Student-Athlete

Thank you for responding to the request for participants in my study titled Influences in the Career Development of Female Student-Athletes Pursuing Careers in the Collegiate Athletics. I would like to hear more about your experiences in pursuing a career in collegiate athletics. Please attend a focus group to be held:

DATE  
TIME  
Office of Student Life  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Conference Room

It will be a small group of about six female student-athletes also intending to pursue a career in collegiate athletics. If for some reason you won't be able to attend the session, please call as soon as possible at (919) 360-4369. Of if you have any questions you may contact me as well.

Again, thanks for your interest to participate. I am looking forward to meeting you on DATE.

Sincerely,

Claire Smith

APPENDIX D  
INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Student-Athlete:

I am a graduate student at the University of Florida. Currently, I am conducting research for my Master's thesis. The topic of my study is Influences in the Career Development of Female Student-Athletes Pursuing Careers in Collegiate Athletics.

The purpose of this study is to explore reasons why current female student-athletes plan to pursue a future career in collegiate athletics. Specifically, this research will attempt to identify common influences that lead to developing a career path towards collegiate athletics. You are asked to participate in this study as you have expressed an interest in pursuing a career in collegiate athletics.

Participants will be asked to partake in a focus group to discuss their experiences in career development towards working in collegiate athletics. The entire time for participation in this study will be less than 2 hours. A facilitator will guide the discussion of the group and two moderators will observe the group to help with data analysis. The session will also be video recorded to assist with data analysis. At the conclusion of the study, participants will have the chance to hear a summary of the discussion for accuracy.

I anticipate no potential risks for you as a participant of this study. Your name and other personal identifiers will not be used in the study. Participation is voluntary, and you may discontinue the study at any time. Benefits for participating in this study include meeting peers with similar career interests as yourself. There is no compensation for participation in this study.

If you have any questions about this research protocol, please contact me at (919) 360-4369 or my faculty supervisor, Dr. May Kim at (352) 392-4042 x1492. Questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant may be directed to the UFIRB office, University of Florida, PO Box 112250, Gainesville, FL 32611 or by phone at (352) 392-0433.

Please sign and return this copy of your informed consent. A second copy is provided for your records. By signing this letter, you acknowledge that you have read and understand the information above and agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX E  
FOCUS GROUP FACILITATOR TRANSCRIPT

As modified from Drago et al. (2005)

(Note: For any answer mentioning a coach, mentor, or parent make sure the gender of the person is clear from the context. If not, follow-up immediately with: “And was this a man or a woman?” to clarify gender.)

Today we are going to discuss pursuing careers in coaching and athletics administration and your thoughts on entering the collegiate athletics field after graduation. Before we get started, I’d like to hand out a sheet for informed consent. Please take a moment to read over it, and if you’re comfortable signing, please do so and hand it back to me. If you do not wish to sign the form or do not want your comments transcribed for research purposes, you are free to leave and no information will be reported about you.

(Gather informed consent forms and place in folder marked, “Informed Consent Forms Only”. Once the forms are in and anyone not wishing to continue has left, recording may begin.)

I’m passing around extra copies of the informed consent form for each of you to keep in your records. Today’s session will be recorded using a video camera. I would like to ensure everyone that the taped session will *only* be reviewed by the select researchers listed on your copy of the informed consent document.

Okay, let’s take a brief moment to introduce ourselves. First names will be sufficient, and please tell us what sport or sports you play here, your major, and whether you are a freshman, sophomore, junior, senior or graduate student.

(Start with the first person immediately to the left of the facilitator. If two participants have the same name, ask the second if you can use a nickname or her name with last initial to distinguish the two. Take notes during introductions. Note: Periodically call on individuals by first name during the session to make transcription easier.)

Okay now that we have all been introduced let’s get started. Also, I would like to remind everyone that this will be an open discussion based format.

(Ask questions in numerical order leaving ample time for discussion. Follow all instructions within each question)

1. How did you choose your academic major?
2. What are some careers in collegiate athletics? (wait for answers, then) How did you learn about careers in collegiate athletics?
3. When did you identify collegiate athletics as a potential career path?
4. What future role or roles do you intend to pursue in collegiate athletics? (pause for answers, then) What made you decide to pursue this role in collegiate athletics?
5. Are there any individuals who helped you in your decision to pursue collegiate athletics as a career?

6. Have any of you been involved in coaching or administration in sports? (If any yes's continue, otherwise skip to 8.) What sort of work did this involve, and did you enjoy the work?
7. What are your post graduation plans for pursuing a career in collegiate athletics?
8. What advice would you give a fellow female student-athlete who wants to pursue a career in collegiate athletics?
9. Now I am going to give you a brief summary of what we discussed here. After I have finished please provide me with your thoughts about the summary.

Finally, I'd like to gather some voluntary demographic data from each of you. (Pass out demographic questionnaire starting with individual to the facilitator's immediate left.)

(Stop transcription, hand each participant the Focus Group Follow-Up sheet.)

Thanks for your help today. To ensure confidentiality, please do not report to others things that were said during this session. The follow-up sheet I have passed out has information about how to obtain results or further information from this study. Thanks again for your participation.

Note: Potential areas of discussion in with the facilitator must redirect –

- Extended discussion on barriers keeping females from entering athletic field
- Extended discussion of a particular coach
- Extended discussion of subjects not relevant in nature

APPENDIX F  
DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Please answer the following questions to help gather background information. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose to not answer any of the following.

Name:

Age:

Sport(s) you play in college:

Number of years competing in your sport(s):

Major in college:

Minor in college (if any):

Your race/ethnicity:

The gender of your college head coach:

The gender of your college assistant coach(es):

The gender of your high school head coach:

The gender of your high school assistant coach(es):

Please answer the following statements:

After graduation I plan to pursue a career in sports other than as a professional athlete:

- |                    |                       |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| - Completely Agree | - Completely Disagree |
| - Mostly Agree     | - Mostly Disagree     |
| - Slightly Agree   | - Slightly Disagree   |

After graduation I plan to pursue a career in collegiate athletics:

- |                    |                       |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| - Completely Agree | - Completely Disagree |
| - Mostly Agree     | - Mostly Disagree     |
| - Slightly Agree   | - Slightly Disagree   |

After graduation I plan to pursue a career outside of sports:

- |                    |                       |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| - Completely Agree | - Completely Disagree |
| - Mostly Agree     | - Mostly Disagree     |
| - Slightly Agree   | - Slightly Disagree   |

In 5 to 10 years, I can see myself working in collegiate athletics:

- |                    |                       |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| - Completely Agree | - Completely Disagree |
| - Mostly Agree     | - Mostly Disagree     |
| - Slightly Agree   | - Slightly Disagree   |

APPENDIX G  
FOCUS GROUP FOLLOW-UP INFORMATION

Thank you for your participation in the study. I hope the data collected at this session will help to gain insight into recruiting more female student-athletes to pursue careers in collegiate athletics. Currently, females are underrepresented in the collegiate athletics, both as coaches and administrators. Much research has focus on the barriers keeping females from entering and negative influences leading females to exit the field. This research intended to look for the factors that might lead current female student-athletes to enter the field.

If you would like to receive information about the conclusions of this study, or have further questions, you may contact the researcher by phone or email as given below. As a reminder all participants' identities will remain confidential.

Sincere thanks,

Claire Smith  
919-360-4369  
[ClaireS@gators.uaa.ufl.edu](mailto:ClaireS@gators.uaa.ufl.edu)

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Claire Smith began her experience in collegiate athletics as a member of the women's gymnastics team at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. During her four years, she was involved in the sport of gymnastics as a participant, club coach and Junior Olympic official. After graduation, she pursued a master's in Sport Management and a second master's in Management at the University of Florida. While pursuing these degrees she began working in collegiate athletics administration as she completed an internship under Lynda Tealer, the Senior Woman's Administrator. After learning about other opportunities within the University Athletic Association, she held a two year internship with the Office of Student Life giving academic support to student-athletes. She continues to reside in Gainesville, Florida, and remains involved in the sport of gymnastics through occasional coaching and judging at the Junior Olympic level.